The future of electronic entertainment issue#116

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Exposed: the first detail
PlayStation3, the new s
of GBA2, and the MS/Ra
Previewed: Haven, Kid Ni
Broken Sword III, Dorhoo
Clock Tower 3, Red Factio
Reviewed: TimeSplitters
Super Monkey Ball 2, Bu
Ikaruga, Auto Modellista

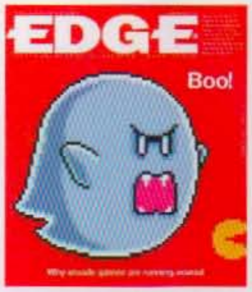
Boo!





Why arcade games are running scared





True story. An eight-year-old is taken into his first arcade by his uncle. Sharing the pool hall off-shoot to a rather popular bar, some 15 machines line two of the walls surrounding the four baize-lined tables. Now under normal circumstances, entering a dimly lit, smoke-filled room crowded by individuals two to three times his age and an electronic cacophony would normally constitute a fairly intimidating experience for our young friend. However, there is little time for self-confidence issues as his attention becomes utterly fixated on his uncle's seeming complete mastery of Centuri's *Phoenix* (years later our protagonist would realise that his uncle's skill was, comparatively speaking, limited).

The boy had played videogames before, of course, mainly in the form of an Atari Video Pinball-styled rip-off. But never with graphics of this calibre. And rarely in colour. An entire new world of possibilities suddenly opened up and many coins, many hours (the odd school lesson was sacrificed – entire worlds required regular saving, after all) would subsequently be spent in that dark room. Thus began a love affair with interactive electronic entertainment that, some 23 years on, has yet to end. Happily ever after doesn't seem that unlikely.

Current generations will sadly never get to experience this. Visually, consoles now effortlessly rival coin-ops while arcades have become increasingly commercial, characterless environments. The great technical evolution is happening in the living room and no longer down your nearest pier. Console ports of arcade versions, once struggling to approximate the aesthetic and content of a particular title, now generally turn up on home hardware in enhanced form, as *Ikaruga* (see p88) aptly reminds us this month.

The arcade isn't dead – it has a future. Ironically, part of its salvation lies in an intimate association with the console world. But things will never be the same again. The magic has passed, unlikely to ever be recaptured in the same way again.



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the 'no more Mario imagery' issue



















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"Casey, right. You're not into sports, are you?"
"I don't think a person should run unless he's being chased."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Sony adds verve to ECTS experience

ECTS finds its feet again thanks to the PlayStation Experience, while on the show floor, price cut announcements dominate discussion

The relocation of ECTS, from last year's inaccessible Docklands home to this year's easily locatable Earl's Court venue, gave the annual trade show a much needed shot in the arm. Although this year's event, which took place from August 29-31, was smaller than in previous years it was a marked improvement on last year's disappointing expo and, despite the non-attendance of Nintendo and Microsoft for the second year running, the inaugural PlayStation Experience was an unqualified success. As well as demonstrating that the shift towards a greater consumer focus was the correct decision for the organisers of ECTS, Sony's slick presentation of its Christmas line-up poses significant questions of both competitors.

Inevitably, the recently announced price cuts dominated debate at the show. Sony was the first to announce that the PlayStation2 price had dropped from £199 to £169.99, and although an Xbox price cut was quickly announced, the impression was that Microsoft had been caught napping. Certainly Sony's announcement seemed to generate more hype among ECTS attendees, and Microsoft's assertion that the Xbox price cut wasn't a direct response didn't appear to bear the scrutiny of more cynical minds than **Edge**'s.



"Microsoft's assertion that the Xbox price cut wasn't a direct response didn't appear to bear the scrutiny of more cynical minds than **Edge**'s"

However, Microsoft's apparent surprise was in itself surprising; after all, Sony's announcement was absolutely in line with the strategy used previously during the era of the original PlayStation. And although the new Xbox price of £159.99 represents enormous value for money, it will be interesting to see whether being the wrong side of £150 will hamper the console's chances of increasing its market share at Christmas. In any case, as **Edge** goes to press, the immediate impact of the price cuts – or Nintendo's decision not to lower the price of the GameCube, which remains at £129.99 – isn't apparent, and research agency Datamonitor is predicting that further cuts could be made before Christmas.

Away from the heated discussion round the ECTS bar though, the topography of the show floor was rather muted. It wasn't, for example, characterised by the types of elaborate stands that have proliferated in previous years – a measure of the degree to which the publishing world's big-hitters were instead focusing their efforts and resources on the PlayStation Experience next door. Nevertheless, companies such as Acclaim, Ubi Soft, Rage, Konami and Infogrames displayed a significant presence, even if they were showing little more than had been on view at E3.

While Acclaim was demonstrating its new (though hardly desirable) controversy-seeking marketing campaigns, Ubi Soft's *Splinter Cell* was winning plaudits and Konami's *Dancing Stage Party* was attracting the attention of nimble-footed attendees. Infogrames, meanwhile, had erected a mini movie theatre to exhibit its forthcoming wares, and Rage titles *Rocky* (see p90) and *Lamborghini* were heavily subscribed. Aside from the major publishers, however, there were also several titles worth seeking out despite a relative lack of elaborate attention-grabbing antics. *Monkey Ball Jr.* developer, Realism, had a stand for example, confirming the title as one to watch. Climax was also on hand behind closed doors to show off the new shape that *Warhammer Online* is taking – having shifted away from the RTS genre to an outright RPG. Indeed for those who got the chance to check it out, it was one of the most impressive titles on display, combining the rich heritage of a popular franchise with a host of original ideas. And though franchise-less, CDV's *Breed* was another title that was well received.

There was also the usual number of off-site events, featuring publishers keen to capitalise on the timing of ECTS. Empire, for example, was holding its own software preview in a pub near to the Earl's Court venue, showing off the latest versions of *Total Immersion Racing* and *Big Mutha Truckers*. Fresh from the success of *Warcraft III*, Vivendi also chose to go it alone, holding a press conference in Parsons Green. And Electronic Arts continued its EA Play event at its Chertsey headquarters. The most notable off-site event though was undoubtedly



ECTS was bolstered this year by the addition of the PlayStation Experience, a compelling statement of Sony's intent

ECTS Awards

Despite the small problem of having no lectern, a quick-thinking PR representative swiftly managed to find a bin-sized (and shaped) solution to the problem, enabling Whizzbang TV's Gareth Jones (né Gaz Top) to distribute the ECTS Awards with customary panache. The winners were as follows:

Voted for by visitors to the ECTS Website:
Best Console of the Year:
PlayStation2 (Sony)
Best PC Hardware:
Gainward GeForce 4 'Powerpack' Ultra/750XP Golden Sample
Best Console Game of the Year:
Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar North)
Best PC Game of the Year:
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (EA)
Publisher of the Year:
Electronic Arts

Game of the Show Awards, voted for by a panel of journalists:
Overall Best Game of the Show:
Splinter Cell (Ubi Soft)
Best PC Game of the Show:
Breed (CDV)
Best Console Game of the Show:
Pro Evolution Soccer 2 (Konami)
Best Handheld Game of the Show:
Super Monkey Ball Jr. (THQ)
Best Multiplayer Game of the Show:
Live Action PingPong (Netdol Entertainment)

Sponsored Awards:
The **Edge** Award:
SCEI, *Ico*
'MCV' Best of British Award:
Criterion
'PC Format' Best New Games Kit Award:
nVidia GeForce 4
The 'Develop' Magazine Award for British Game Design Innovation:
Rockstar North, *Grand Theft Auto III*
'PC Gamer' Best PC Developer Award:
Creative Assembly, *Medieval*


Photography: Martin Thompson

Nintendo's breakfast presentation, which saw David Gosen, inexplicably seated in a Big Brother diary room chair, say very little about Nintendo's plans while finding the time to take a couple of unnecessary swipes at Microsoft. Nevertheless, titles such as *Legend of Zelda* and *Metroid Prime* were just as compelling as they were at E3 – even if the odd wrongheaded attendee was still put out by Miyamoto-san's cel-shaded betrayal.

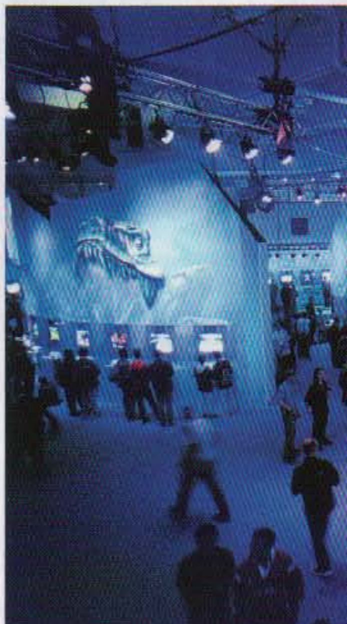
Back at Earl's Court, the more relaxed performance of the major publishers once again allowed a host of lesser players to step into the breach. And once more, the principal beneficiaries were PC hardware manufacturers, middleware providers, a staggering number of CD repair outfits and a healthy contingent of Korean publishers – including GamePark, with its striking new GP32 handheld. ATI and nVidia both had sizeable stands, for example, while Sensaura returned to demonstrate its 3D audio technology. And the Dynamic Korea stand was a predictably diverse affair, with the likes of the sublimely quirky *Live Action Pingpong* rubbing shoulders with more banal titles such as *The Great Merchant of Venice*.

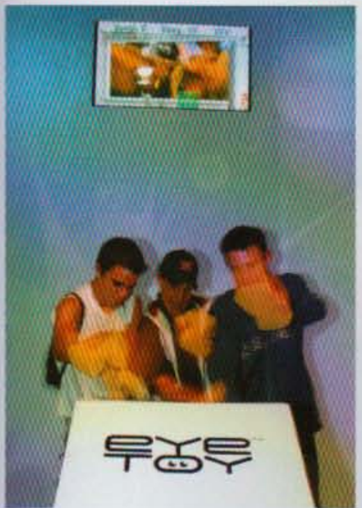
The GP32 was a particular revelation, featuring multimedia playback, backlit screen, ergonomic casing and wireless multiplayer gaming. It's just a shame that it's unlikely to match technical brilliance with marketing expertise or software excellence, and will probably end up alongside the Neo Geo Pocket as another commercially unsuccessful piece of pocket virtuosity. It wasn't the only wireless handheld though; as in previous years, mobile phone gaming was on prominent display, with the Orange stand gaining significant attention, and representatives from Kuju's wireless division wandering round the show. Despite the lack of common standards, the sector finally seems to be making significant inroads thanks to the rollout of GPRS technology and the gradual penetration of Java handsets.

Elsewhere, the other obvious highlights of the exhibition were the Awards, presented by 'Game-Pad's Gareth Jones (see boxout) and the keynote address, presented by SCEE in conjunction with Screen Digest. The latter's Ben Keen highlighted new revenue streams from the likes of wireless, broadband and iTV gaming that will grow the industry beyond those provided by the traditional retail sector, but he stressed that videogame retail is also set to grow. SCEE's David Reeves followed with a summary of Sony's plans for PlayStation2, but a more remarkable statement of intent was taking place next door.

"With Microsoft and Nintendo waiting until the Games Matrix event, Sony once again proved the recipient of an early mover advantage"


There were a number of celebs on hand at the Experience, including Lara Croft









The different faces of the future of gaming? Sony's *Eye Toy* proved massively popular; a proliferation of mobile games were on show; and *The Getaway* had improved since E3

It was difficult to find anyone with a bad word to say about the PlayStation Experience. For a start, it was characterised by an unusually enthusiastic atmosphere – a strange environment for jaded, cynical, videogame journalists to find themselves in. And it was evident from the outset that the layout, presentation and organisation were all first rate. It was also apparent that PlayStation2 and PSone boast a remarkably diverse audience; over the course of the three days, the capacity crowds included visitors from a variety of backgrounds. It was an impressive illustration of the PlayStation brand's broad reach.

For the reasonable sum of £8, this mixed demographic was treated to a veritable feast of entertainment. Live bands and Xfm DJs provided the soundtrack, while a main stage area hosted by Radio One's Emma B featured a diverse array of acts, including some dancegame freestylers. Emily Newton Dunn was also on hand to host an 'Official PlayStation2 Magazine' games challenge area, which featured some genuinely lucrative prizes for the few lucky winners, while various Page 3 models, footballers and American wrestlers turned up to spice things up. There was even the inexplicable sight of crowds gathering round to see the live Linux coding of a 'Hello World' program.

And then, of course, there were the games. Although Microsoft and Nintendo might be able to boast some individual games on their hardware that eclipse anything available on Sony hardware, the PlayStation Experience was a substantial demonstration of the versatility and range of the console's line-up for Christmas and beyond. Every major thirdparty publisher was present, and the general standard of software was incredibly high. Certainly there was nothing especially new on display (apart from the ill-advised decision to show off a *Tomb Raider* technical demo that did little to win over punters) but for consumers who hadn't been to E3 there was much to be savoured. *The Getaway* was looking much improved, for example, while *TimeSplitters2* (see p82) proved massively popular. THQ's wrestling titles were also eagerly lapped up, and Sony's *Eye Toy* titles were second only to networked titles such as *Hardware* and *Auto Modellista* in arresting the attention of nearly all attendees.

Significantly, the success of the PlayStation Experience wasn't merely confined to the positive word of mouth that it will have generated among what is admittedly a relatively small proportion of console owners. It was also enormously well-received by thirdparty publishers, and generated a healthy number of mainstream column inches. And with Microsoft and Nintendo waiting until the forthcoming Games Matrix event, Sony once again proved the recipient of an early mover advantage. It's also a positive new direction for ECTS, with the show proper proving an effective forum for a wide range of videogame service companies, with PlayStation Experience alongside to create significant consumer and publisher interest. All of which should provide the event organisers with a solid base from which to move forward next year.

Edge's ECTS Highlights

Some of Edge's choice cuts from the show floor, in no particular order:

- Rumours that publishers are already approaching developers with regard to developing PlayStation3 titles
- Capital Entertainment Group continuing its admirable bid to generate some fresh IP
- A disgruntled show-goer's reaction to discovering that Infogrames was only showing trailers of 'Matrix' *the film*
- The absence of the not-very-sorely-missed *Erotic Island* stand
- And the absence of the equally not-very-sorely-missed *Hooligans* bar
- A PR representative inviting **Edge** to feel his sweaty armpit to find out exactly how hard he was working at the PlayStation Experience
- nVidia's dancing girls, who never stopped dancing and seemed to want to start some sort of bizarre new Internet meme
- The parties: none as large as Sony's traditional bash, which didn't take place this year, but enough to be getting on with; Babelmedia's Scalextric party on Thursday; Wanadoo's industry DJ Face Off on Friday night; and an **Edge** staffer's rather impromptu affair on the Saturday















Of the games on show at ECTS (top row from left) *Breed*, *Super Monkey Ball Jr.* and *Splinter Cell* all stood out. Over at the PlayStation Experience (bottom row from left), *The Getaway* had improved since E3, *Ratchet & Clank* looked promising and *Hardware* proved popular

GDCE develops further

The two-year-old European conference grows in importance with an increased attendance and a quality line-up



This year's Game Developers Conference Europe, which took place from August 27–29, joined ECTS in the move from ExCel to Earl's Court and although the event's still only in its second year, it continues to build momentum as an increasingly relevant date in the videogame calendar. While it's still less significant in size and scope than the original GDC, which takes place in the US around March every year, the European counterpart is rapidly establishing itself as a forum for the sort of debate that's essential if developers are to make better games. Consequently, attendance figures showed an increase compared to last year, while the line-up of speakers, panels and discussions boasted just as much diversity and quality.

"GDCE is rapidly establishing itself as a forum for the sort of debate that's essential if developers are to make better games"

Although it was more difficult this year to identify common themes and trends, most speakers took it for granted that there is currently an ominous level of risk aversion on the part of the publishing community. So GDCE's keynote address, 'The Method: A Model for Game Design' delivered by Mark Cerny, couldn't have been more timely.

After being introduced by Jez San, Cerny quickly set about detailing the finer points of his approach to making games (see p76). This largely places greater emphasis on the preproduction phase of development (ie the conceptual/planning phase) and a move away from the current heavy reliance on written documentation during development. Perhaps the most interesting point made was that developers need to be more willing to discard ideas that aren't working. Although it seems counterintuitive, this would, Cerny argued, actually reduce losses that would otherwise be increased by the incursion of distribution and marketing costs – of crucial importance in the current hit-driven climate, in which only a handful of titles are actually delivering significant profit.



Bill Fulton and Keith Steury from Microsoft's User-Testing Group gave a fascinating presentation concerning the feedback process that heavily influenced *Halo*'s development

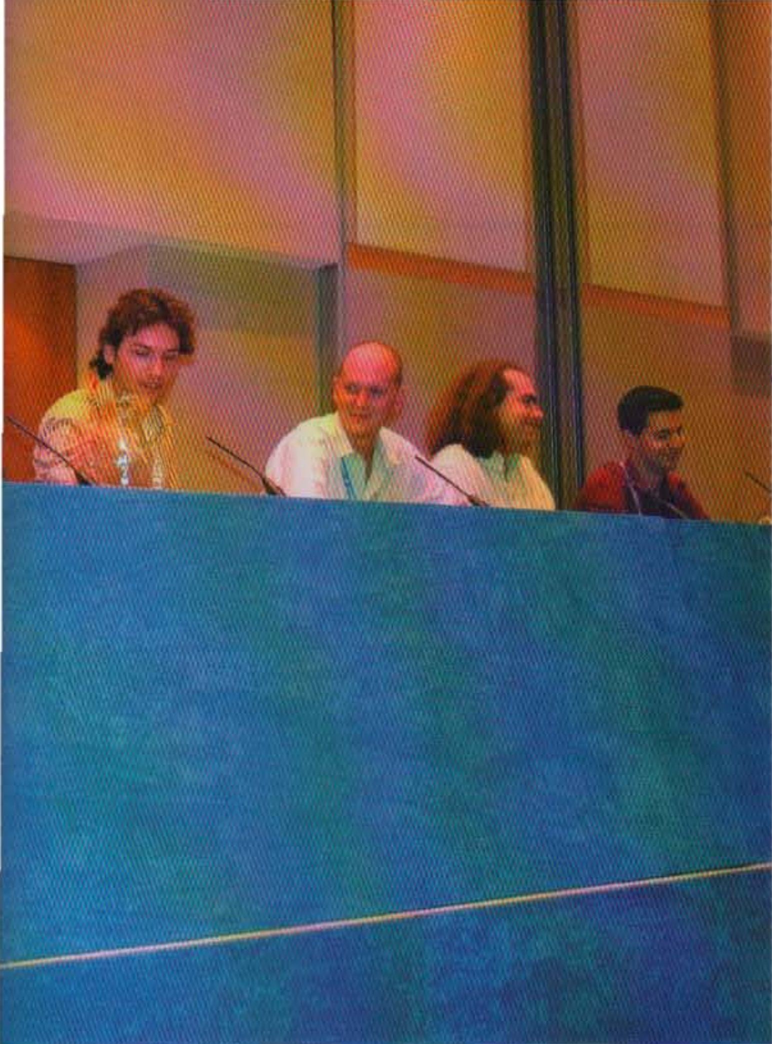
Long-term strategy

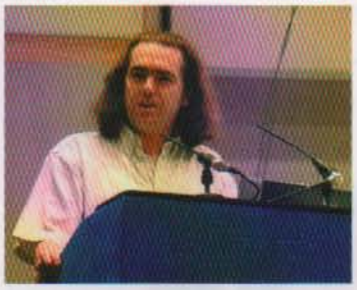
Nevertheless, **Edge** couldn't help feeling that Cerny's address could have benefited from a wider audience than merely the development community. Although there was much that was of use to any developer, most are only too keenly aware of the importance of preproduction. It's really the publishing community that has to be persuaded to make a fundamental transition from short-term planning and development, to a longer-term view. But the notion that investing more in the short-term can lead to a more profitable long-term strategy is, in **Edge**'s opinion, a compelling one.

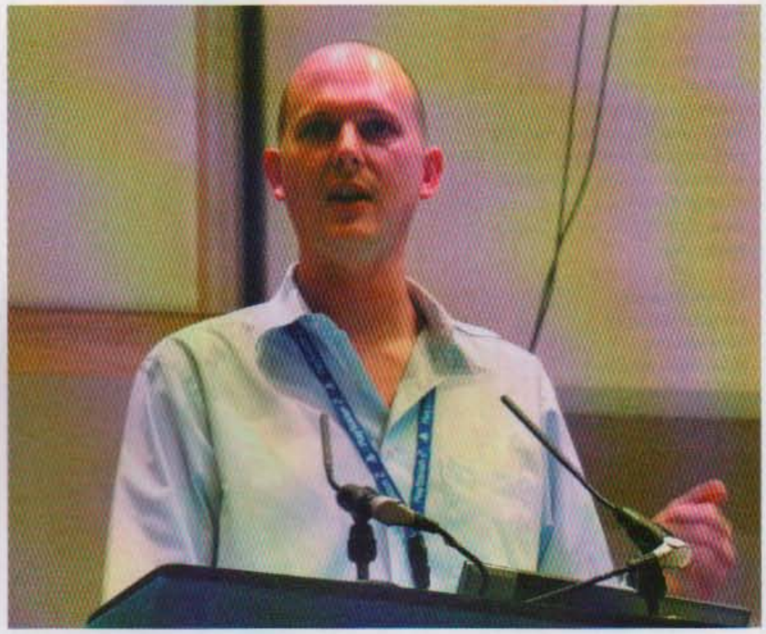
For any developers that were seeking insight into what currently makes publishers tick, there were several interesting speakers. 'From Pitch to Publish: Getting the Deal' was a self-explanatory panel discussion enlivened by the inclusion of Kevin Bachus of ex-Xbox fame, SCEE's Zene Colaco and Adrian Curry of the current Xbox team. Elsewhere, Bruce McMillan's 'Beyond a Great Game, Building a Franchise', was less instructive, if no less entertaining. Using the *Harry Potter* and *FIFA* licences as case studies, it did offer significant insight into how Electronic Arts has maintained its publishing dominance, but not every developer or publisher has the clout to acquire a licence as lucrative as Ms Rowling's opus. And although McMillan conceded that recent outings for the *FIFA* licence have lost their lustre, the talk did demonstrate the company's characteristically slick presentation skills.

Academic day

But aside from major speakers such as McMillan and Cerny, there was much on offer for all facets of the development industry. The first day of the event was given over to sponsored tutorials and the IGDA-sponsored academic day, featuring Microsoft, which was running both the DirectX Developer Day as well as the Xbox Open for the inside track on its development tools, and graphics chip manufacturer, ATI, also running tutorials.







Meanwhile, the academic day saw a variety of panels and discussions ranging from the benefits of games research to case studies of existing videogame curriculums.

New rule book

Other highlights included Harvey Smith of Ion Storm talking about 'Systemic Level Design for Emergent Gameplay', which used *Deux Ex* as a case study for the use and advantages of globally defined characteristics and rules in creating consistent gameworlds. Ken Perlin's 'Implementing Procedural Personality Effects Over a 3D Model' was equally informative, and well received, covering a number of techniques for making animated characters behave in a more lifelike manner. Lionhead's Richard Evans even threw in a bit of Heidegger and Wittgenstein to make his talk, 'Social Processes: Moving Beyond Individualism', flow a bit more smoothly.

Ultimately though, the real highlight of the three days (or at least an entertaining way to end the conference, should **Edge** be laid open to entirely justifiable accusations of bias thanks to its own involvement) was the 'Choosing the Best Game Ever' panel. Featuring a whole host of dignitaries, including Charles Cecil, SCEE's Phil Harrison, Jon Hare of Sensible Software fame and indeed **Edge**, this discussion managed to meander its way through to the conclusion that *Super Mario 64* is the best



game ever developed. On the way, though, and under the steady guidance of Future Publishing's Mike Goldsmith, there were a number of highlights (the number of blank looks received by **Edge**'s nomination, *Rogue*, not among them; clearly not many people had read **E**98's 'The Making Of...'). Sadly, most can't be mentioned in a family publication such as **Edge**.

Still, the event left attendees in a buoyant mood and looking forward to next year's event. After all, it's crucial that events such as GDCE do establish themselves if the European development community is to reassert its excellence and prominence on a global scale. And although there was some repetition of material that had been aired at GDC in March, this year's event was another positive sign that this is a possibility.



Mark Cerny (far left) shook things up with his suggestion that, using his approach, developers could expect to spend $1m purely on preproduction. 'Choosing the Best Game Ever' saw Charles Cecil (left) argue (unsuccessfully) for *Grand Theft Auto III*, Phil Harrison (above) extol the virtues of *Tetris* and Jon Hare (top) put together a case for *Space Invaders*

Game Boy Advance gets hardware upgrade

Industry insiders suggest Nintendo's handheld is set to receive a major technological upgrade by the end of the year

Ages of Game Boy

Nintendo's heroic handheld hasn't shifted over 130m units by standing still. Edge looks at the evolution of Boy:

1989, Game Boy: although larger than a standard pocket, the original Game Boy saw off stiff competition from Atari's Lynx and Sega's Game Gear
1996, Game Boy Pocket: a rather more portable version was eventually introduced
1998, Game Boy Pocket Light: sadly only released in Japan, and proved unpopular thanks to the need for extra batteries
1998, Game Boy Color: a rather more successful upgrade, introducing a colour palette and faster processor
2001, Game Boy Advance: boasting backwards compatibility and the first major architectural overhaul, the GBA has managed to shift over 4m units in Europe alone since launch, and this in spite of its murky screen

Current software:
Mario Kart Advance
Advance Wars
Super Mario Advance 2
Breath of Fire II
Denki Blocks
Kuru Kuru Kururin
Chu Chu Rocket
Golden Sun
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity

Forthcoming software:
Metroid Fusion
Super Monkey Ball Jr.
Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3
Game & Watch Gallery Advance
Grand Theft Auto III
Sim City
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Prophecy
Rayman 3
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers



Despite the recent European release of a limited platinum edition Game Boy Advance, **Edge** has received confirmation of online reports that a sequel to the massively popular handheld is on its way. The new, backlit version could even be in Japanese stores before the end of the year, with a European release set to follow in 2003 according to **Edge**'s sources, though Nintendo has yet to confirm or deny the rumours.

The current GBA is, according to Nintendo, one of the fastest selling consoles ever, having shifted over 4m units in Europe since its launch in June of last year, despite a screen that's almost unusable in anything less than perfect lighting conditions. It's also set to benefit from a massive selection of new software this Christmas, taking the number of titles available for the platform to over 200.

Firstparty titles currently in development include *Metroid Fusion*, *Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3* and *Game & Watch Gallery Advance*, while these will be supplemented by thirdparty titles such as *GTAIII*, *Sim City*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Prophecy*, *Rayman 3* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

Upgrade scheme

Nevertheless, recent Internet reports hint that a new backlit version of the platform has gone into testing at Nintendo's German headquarters. Intriguingly, these reports go on to suggest that Nintendo may even be considering a 16 (£10) upgrade scheme for existing GBA owners when the new version is released. Although **Edge** can't comment on the veracity of the latter point, our own sources have provided fairly compelling evidence that a new hardware iteration is on the way.

It wouldn't be the first time that Nintendo has experimented with backlit handheld technology. A previous experiment, in the shape of the Game Boy Pocket Light, proved shortlived as Japanese users disliked the additional bulk and cost of an extra two batteries. According to **Edge**'s sources though, the company is once again willing to examine the possibility of improving the unit's performance under poor lighting conditions.

Apparently, the new type of GBA technology will be substantially different to existing versions. The most obvious modification is that the device will fold out, in a manner that harks back to Nintendo's enormously successful *Game & Watch* series.

Equally reminiscent of earlier Nintendo hardware – in this case the SNES – is the addition of two new face buttons, resulting in



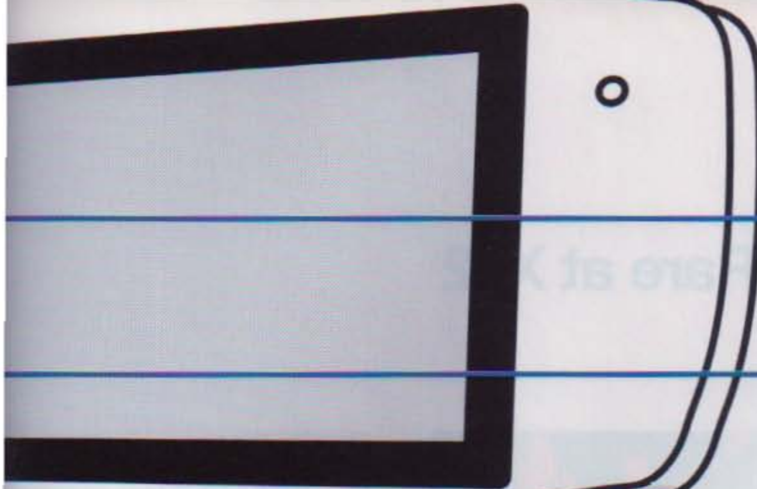
These 'concept' sketches were provided by an industry insider. Hopefully the real thing will have a bit more of a wow factor

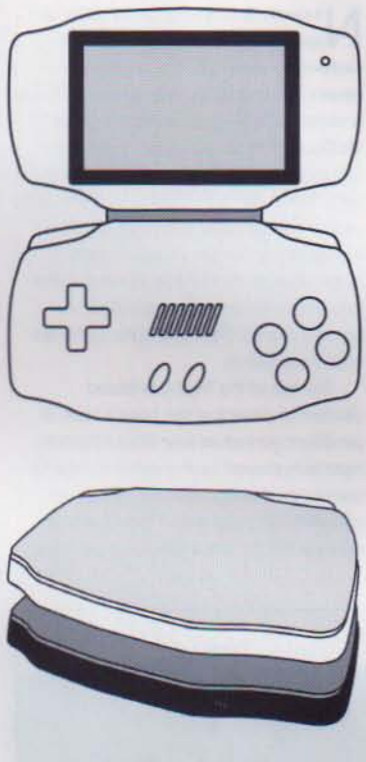






Left to right, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Prophecy*, *Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* are all thirdparty titles due for release before Christmas. The GBA roster is mightily impressive with an estimated 200 titles already available on the format





four differently coloured buttons in addition to the two trigger buttons. A further change is that the new model will allegedly use an internal slimline battery as a power source, akin to those currently used by mobile phones, in place of the standard two AA battery configuration that GBA owners will be used to.

Lights, action

Significantly, this battery is expected to provide around ten hours of battery life before it needs recharging – finally making it possible for a backlit screen that satisfies Nintendo's stringent attitude towards battery life. Indeed **Edge**'s sources confirm online reports that the unit will feature a larger, backlit screen than current models, with a new TFT screen, complete with variable contrast, to be manufactured by Sharp.

Significantly, the new model is also set to receive an upgrade to internal architecture, in the shape of a more powerful processor, and possibly the addition of more onboard RAM. Nevertheless, the new device will be compatible with the existing catalogue of GBA software, and in spite of the introduction of major new technology, the device will remain light and slim. Apparently, Nintendo is even exploring the possibility of implementing two other prototypes; a standard, two-button GBA featuring a backlit screen, and a four-button backlit model.

Although Nintendo has yet to release a statement confirming the existence or development of a new model, company insiders are reporting that the unit will ship for under ¥10,000 (£55). And despite the lack of fanfare, the new model could be on sale as soon as late November in Japan, with a US release to follow in December and a European release set for February or March next year.

With such an imminent release date, it should soon become clear whether **Edge**'s sources are correct.

CUTTINGS



Earthquake game to hit UK shelves

Residents of Wolverhampton will be pleased to hear that Irem's earth-trembling *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* is to get a UK release, courtesy of publisher Agetech. Distributed by Big Ben Interactive, the unusual survival horror title garnered an impressive score of seven from this publication and was also a nominee for **Edge**'s own ECTS award for innovation in game design. The game will be retitled *SOS Escape* and although a release date has yet to be confirmed Big Ben is hoping to get it into shops before Christmas.

SoftWide goes online

Tribeka's online distribution chain SoftWide (featured in **E**114, p12) has just launched its Website. At the time of writing the site is undergoing final adjustments but should be fully operational by the time you read this. Delivering software for PCs, Macs, PDAs and Linux platforms the company is looking to eventually stock console games. Due to the flexibility of the system SoftWide online is offering a 'buy two get one free' offer to all customers and will dispatch orders within one day. Go to http://www.softwide.com for more information.







Left to right, *Metroid Fusion*, *Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3* and *Contra Advance*. If rumours are to be believed these first and thirdparty games could be making use of the upgraded GBA technology in time for Christmas. Get those stockings out in preparation

Microsoft looks likely to unveil Rare at X02

Nintendo finally quashes the rumours and sells its stake in Rare. But will Microsoft be picking up the languishing UK developer?



Rare has an enviable record of producing quality titles, such as *GoldenEye* (above) and *Perfect Dark*. But insiders have suggested that the UK softco has felt hamstrung by its exclusive ties with Nintendo. A split seemed inevitable

Nintendo has finally ended months of speculation and called off its relationship with Rare. In a terse press release Nintendo of America's executive vice president of sales and marketing, **Peter McDougall**, twisted the knife further by criticising Rare's output as a reason for the split. "Nintendo had the ability to continue its exclusive relationship with Rare, but in looking at the company's recent track record it became clear that its value to the future of Nintendo would be limited." A typically demure Rare refused to comment on the separation.

The fate of the Twycross-based *GoldenEye* developer has been a topic of persistent conjecture ever since Nintendo reportedly passed up the option to take full ownership of the company about a year ago. Activision was also in the running to take the 49 per cent stake in the company, but apparently balked at the price that Nintendo was asking. **Edge**'s sources suggest that Microsoft has now snapped up Rare for around £250m, though other rumours suggest a much larger deal.





Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* (left) stunned gamers when it was released on the SNES in 1994, but *Donkey Kong 64* (right) struggled at retail, as did some of its other major N64 titles

Rare opportunity

Although the move is clearly good news for Microsoft and the Xbox, which continues to suffer from a relatively narrow selection of software, it isn't entirely clear what the company will be obtaining for the asking price. Other rumours suggest that Rare's founders, Tim and Chris Stamper, aim to retire soon, and it's not clear how much commercial clout the Rare brand has these days. As Nintendo still retains exclusive rights to all its original properties and franchises featured in games developed by Rare, including *Donkey Kong*, *Diddy Kong* and *Star Fox*, **Edge** has to wonder about the long-term prospects of the deal for Microsoft. Will Joanna Dark be enough to boost sales of the Xbox?

Certainly, the acquisition has yet to be finalised. Nevertheless, insiders are confident that the deal will be announced in Seville, and it's alleged that Rare's *Kameo* (see **E**99) is already up and running on Xbox hardware.

Whether the deal does go ahead or not, unsubstantiated rumours suggest that Microsoft is on the acquisition trail for an even bigger target than Rare. Although **Edge** hasn't been able to confirm reports that this could be Sega, the apparent desire of Microsoft to rebrand the Xbox in Japan would certainly lend sufficient strategic motivation for a deal to take place in spite of Sega's multiformat development. Other possible targets that have been mooted include the Vivendi Universal portfolio given the current financial struggles of the division's parent company.

If either of these deals is announced at Microsoft's X02 event in Seville, expect a full report from the event next issue.

Photography: **Martin Thompson**





By the time you read this it should be clear if Microsoft has bought the coy UK developer. But at what price, and when will we see the games?

STOP PRESS September 25

Just on the day Edge went to press confirmation emerged from X02 that Microsoft has indeed acquired Rare for $375m (£240m). The deal will see the UK developer creating exclusive content for the Xbox, with *Kameo* due to hit shelves in spring 2002. Expect a full news report next issue.

PlayStation3 rumours proliferate

ECTS rumours regarding the introduction of Sony's next hardware upgrade suggest distributed future for PlayStation

Despite the fact that Sony has yet to announce the timing of the European launch of online services for PlayStation2, reports have already begun to emerge regarding the inevitable introduction of the console's successor. And though **Edge** doesn't have the same sort of assurances as those regarding a sequel to the GBA (see p12), this information confirms the impression given by developers at the recent GDCE and ECTS exhibitions, many of whom were indicating the readiness of publishers already looking forward to the next iteration of PlayStation hardware.

According to an article by Reuters, PlayStation3 is likely to be introduced in 2005 – albeit in an almost unrecognisable form. Reuters quoted SCE's **Kenichi Fukunaga**: "We're not thinking about hardware. The ideal solution would be having an operating system installed in various home appliances that could run game programs." Certainly, Sony is known to be conducting a joint project with Toshiba and IBM which aims to create a powerful new processor, suited to the sort of distributed vision outlined by Fukunaga-san. With this project due for completion in 2005, it would certainly appear to fuel speculation that this is indeed when we'll see PlayStation3 – and it is also the date by which analysts are predicting that broadband networks will have achieved massmarket penetration.

Market leader

Nevertheless, despite rumours pointing to a relatively early introduction of the next PlayStation, there have also been murmurings that Sony has been surprised by the relative lack of retail success that Microsoft has enjoyed with Xbox – and that this may yet allow the company to delay the introduction of its PlayStation3. With PlayStation2 currently outselling its competitors by some eight times, Sony is unlikely to make any announcements any time soon, but **Edge** intends to keep abreast of any developments.

PlayStation®3



Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Conflict: Desert Storm	Xbox, PC, PS2	SCi	Pivotal Games	7
Riding Spirits	PS2	Bam! Entertainment	Spike	7
TOCA Race Driver	PS2, PC	Codemasters	In-house	7
Beach Spikers	GameCube	Sega	Sega-AM2	6
Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller	Xbox	Sega	Hitmaker	6
Mafia: City of Lost Heaven	PC	Take 2	Illusion Softworks	6
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2	PS2, GC, Xbox, GBA	Activision	HotGen Studios	6
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	PS2, Xbox, GC, PC	Electronic Arts	Black Box	6
Eggo Mania	GBA, GC, PS2, Xbox	Big Ben Interactive	HotGen Studios	5
GunGrave	PS2	Sega	Red Entertainment	5
Murakumo	Xbox	From Software	In-house	5
Turok Evolution	Xbox, PS2, GC	Acclaim	In-house	5
Gio Gio's Bizarre Adventure	PS2	Capcom	In-house	4



Conflict: Desert Storm



Riding Spirits



TOCA Race Driver



Beach Spikers

CUTTINGS



Stuff Live gets Games Matrix

Stuff Live, the consumer technology exhibition will this year include a dedicated videogame event called Games Matrix. The event takes place at Earls Court from October 3–6, in association with Future Games' own videogame Website, gamesradar.com – recently chosen by MSN.co.uk as its videogame partner. No doubt Microsoft and Nintendo, who will both be showcasing forthcoming software will be hoping that the event matches the success of Sony's PlayStation Experience. Microsoft is also set to showcase its Xbox Live service, while other highlights include the World Cyber Games, which is offering a £20,000 cash prize. See http://www.stuffLIVE.co.uk for more information.

PlayStation cheating

After the teething troubles experienced by Square's PlayOnline service, reports have emerged from the US that the recent rollout of online software has been similarly beset by users taking advantage of loopholes in games such as *Madden NFL 2003*. Other games to suffer include *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs* which, despite being a broadband-only game, has been plagued by narrowband users who make games impossible to play by slowing down server traffic. Nevertheless, such problems won't be unfamiliar to PC online gamers, and Sony will no doubt learn from experience. There's still no word, though, regarding the eventual European rollout of online services.

Orange to publish games

Wireless operator Orange recently formed its own in-house games publishing division to develop and franchise games that will be playable over the company's mobile phone networks. The company has already announced six games, and invested £1.8m in a new central server system to host massively multiplayer games. The games include *Judge Dredd: Cityquake* and *Star Runner*, both developed by Rebellion, and *Blood & Sand* and *Gangsta of Love*, developed by Atomic Planet Entertainment.

www.cri-mw.co.jp

Less is more

Designed for Dreamcast, CRI's high-quality audio and video software compression technology is now going cross-platform

Audio and video compression software plays a key role in the forward march of technology, just think about the impact of mp3. Even within the game space, there have been some notable examples; Eidos' core technology in the days before *Tomb Raider*, was compression. And while the increasing processing power of consoles and PCs has lessened its importance, compression remains an important tool for game developers.

Well-known to Japanese game developers, the main exposure of CRI Middleware's technology outside of its homeland has been the couple of seconds of logo splash screens at the start of Sega's Dreamcast games. Unsurprisingly this was because until Sega's restructuring, CRI was a technology division at CSK, Sega's parent company. Its technology has been used in over 400 Dreamcast titles. Now a separate company, 14-months-old and renamed CRI Middleware, it's looking to sell its products further afield, as well as across all hardware platforms.

"Our goal is to become an oasis for the game industry. We want to collaborate with developers to make quality videogames," says Mr **Oshimi**, CRI's manager of middleware development. And it's already had success in Japan with Tecmo using the technology for *Dead or Alive 3*. Other companies developing Xbox titles have licensed CRI tools, including Konami for *Silent Hill 2* and Anchor for *WWF Raw*, while Capcom's PS2 beat 'em up, *Gio Gio's Bizarre Adventure* relies on CRI's video codex to ensure the crisp playback of its anime movies.

The company's two main technologies are the ADX audio codex, which was first introduced on the Saturn, and the MPEG Sofdec movie codex. These software compression technologies are designed to minimise the size of audio and video files respectively, while ensuring high playback quality and low requirements in terms of system resources.

Expansive range

As well as offering its core technologies, CRI Middleware is branching out into new areas too. One intriguing example is its multilingual Clipper lip-synch system. Using an audio data file as an input, Clipper generates the correct lip movements via the five vowel mouth shapes and the silent marker. For higher quality work, additional shapes can be added to this set. More abstract is the virtual disk image file system, ROFS. This reduces a developer's need to formalise a game's data structure with that of each console. Typically each console has a different file name format and varying limitations on number of directories or files. ROFS acts as a virtual disk, reducing the need for developers to organise their data structures for each platform.



Using CRI's MPEG Sofdec, it's possible to use video files as a texture (above)



Defining a video in three dimensions means it can interact with 3D models. In this case, the 3D video torus clips the polygonal teapot perfectly (above)

Multiple streaming

ADX is a multi-streaming technology, which allows developers to manage multiple audio streams from a disk. This means music files can be played back simultaneously with character speech while other data such as a movie is being streamed from DVD. ADX can also play back a seamless loop of sound effects using standard wave forms while handling other sound effects or voice audio. A related technology, AIX, enables the playback of multiple tracks, which are interleaved into a single audio file prior to playback.

The standard compression mode used, ADX, is a CD-quality technology which requires around 0.1 per cent of a typical CPU budget to decode. This makes it ideal for sound effects and in-game music. For character voices, the AHX high-compression mode is more useful. Equivalent in quality to mp3, AHX is encoded at a lower bitrate of 54kbps compared to 108kbps for ADX and 384kbps for standard wave audio. It requires around one per cent of CPU to be decoded and played.

CRI's MPEG Sofdec movie codex is a high-quality video decoder, which uses an enhanced MPEG1 codex. CRI claims its playback is of higher quality than the MPEG standard in terms of the crispness of animation playback, which is particularly important for anime-style video and artifacting such as macro-blocking. It can play back video in resolutions of up to 800 x 600 pixels, though 640 x 480 is more typical, at up to 60 frames per second.

As with the audio playback, multiple video streams can be simultaneously displayed or paused without interfering with each other. Video streams can also be used as textures and displayed on polygonal models. Another effect is the creation of 3D videos, that is video with z-depth information. These can interact with polygonal models in the manner of a 3D scene, which means developers can create high-quality effects using a minimum of polygons.





Using movies instead of particle effects, as demonstrated in these examples, means developers can create high quality effects with low resource overheads

www.synapticsoup.com

Cipher's new secrets

UK engine vendor Synaptic Soup proves that small remains beautiful and can survive even in the competitive world of game middleware







3Dlabs used Cipher to demonstrate the power of its upcoming chips. This temple level has ridiculous amounts of geometry, neat lighting and advanced shader effects

It's been over two years since the founders of Synaptic Soup left their day jobs to branch out as a trio (see **E**91). "The most important thing we've learned is to target the right people," says development director **Vince Farquharson**. "The big publishers will talk to you but they're always going to go for the high-profile game engines because the finance director recognises the company name."

However, this isn't to say that Synaptic Soup's Cipher PC engine hasn't had its share of high-profile clients. Both nVidia and 3Dlabs have licensed the technology to create high-end demos to show off new pieces of silicon, for example. But in terms of naming developers using Cipher for games, Farquharson remains coy.

"We've got five paying clients at the moment," he reveals before adding the caveat, "We can't tell you who they are because of the NDAs." The problem, he explains, is that because of Cipher's low cost of entry, the majority are startups using Cipher to work on a game prototype. Until those games are signed by publishers, the secrecy of the games business must prevail.

Happily, Synaptic Soup does have something it can shout about; it's releasing a new version of Cipher. "Although labelled version 1.3, it's actually as significant as the original engine release," says technical director, **Rik Heywood**. There are plenty of improvements under the hood of course. The quality of the collision detection has been upped, the networking code is more robust and makes better use of bandwidth, and it's much easier to integrate skinned and rigid components on the same character model. But in keeping with a wider trend, the most important step forward has been in the package's usability, particularly for artists.

"There's been an explosion in the ways of defining shader effects such as nVidia's Cg language," Heywood explains. "Yet using Cg means artists still have to code in the equivalent of C. It isn't going to happen. Our approach is to work at a much higher level." The solution within Cipher is a shader viewer driven by simple drop down menus, which allow artists to tweak the parameters of their shaders in realtime. And because the viewer uses Cipher's renderer, the results are exactly as will be seen in-game so it doubles as a model and animation viewer too.

"For artists this is a much more systematic approach," reckons **Karl Wickens**, Synaptic Soup's art director. "Just like using layers to build up images in Photoshop, you can layer shader effects which will be implemented as multipasses textures by graphics cards." In addition, there's also a particle effects designer, which once again uses shaders to create its magic. Both come complete with stacks of samples and full documentation and tutorials. "We work very closely with our clients to make sure we support them as much as possible," says Farquharson. "It's an intimate relationship, which is maybe something that differentiates us from the larger middleware companies."

Going for games

Synaptic Soup's original plan was to develop and license the Cipher engine, while using it to develop a game, a steampunk build 'em and race 'em called *Crazy Car Championship*. Apart from a couple of demo levels, it remains on the drawing board though. "Partly it's because Cipher has gone so well," says Farquharson. "It's offset progress on the game." As a three-man team and a handful of freelancers, there's obviously little time left to concentrate on getting *Crazy Car Championship* up to speed. "The basic gameplay is all there and working, but we'd need to spend a lot of time working up all the art assets," Farquharson says. In the meantime, the team mentions, almost in passing, that it is in the process of working up another game concept. The outfit certainly can't be faulted for ambition.

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Beer goggles? It seems only alcohol could enhance the quality of Virtual Boy titles for this forumite (right)







Shy and retiring ex-**Edge** editor Tony Mott (in the pink T-shirt) was on hand to watch over his flock





Otakuman, just another superhero **Edge** reader. Look for his continuing adventures in issue #2

01 GeekMeet 2002

UK: In what's rapidly becoming one of the most important biannual events in the videogame calendar, an otherwise nondescript and rainy weekend in September witnessed the second proper Bath **Edge** Forum Meet. Although not officially endorsed by Future Games, a few **Edge** staffers were on hand to join some 60 forum users in a (rather boozy) celebration of videogaming in all its forms. Although some attendees managed to make a full weekend of the event, taking in several of Bath's premier nite spots, **Edge**'s record can only extend to the meet proper, which was characterised by some exemplary polite conversation and several multiplayer gaming sessions, ranging from *Halo* to *Samba de Amigo* (**Edge** would like to point out the thirdparty maracas in defence of its own rather poor record at the latter; it was certainly nothing to do with alcohol). To make sure you don't miss out on the next GeekMeet, point your browsers to http://forum.edge-online.com/

02 Blessed are the geeks

UK: But it's not all socialising on the **Edge** forums. As if to demonstrate that forumites are equally capable of producing intelligent debate and scientific analysis of the merits of various videogame consoles, along comes 'Blessed' magazine. It's been put together by Michael French and Dan Croucher, who met on the Internet courtesy of the **Edge** Forum, along with several other contributors. Highlights of the first issue include a diary of a bedroom coder, recounting the trials and tribulations of developing a *Bomberman* clone, and a quite disturbing anthropological account of gamers and their Internet forums. There's also 'Otakuman', a colour comic strip and several other columnists. For more information, email mail@blessedmagazine.com

Soundbytes

"I am disappointed. She is on my desktop computer at home."
A forlorn North Wales landlord, on having to turn away 'Tomb Raider' star Angelina Jolie because there was no room at his inn.

"I don't want to become too well known. That way, I can still go to the naughty spots around Kabukicho in Shinjuku and read the odd dirty book."
We think *Onimusha* creator Keiji Inafune, interviewed in 'Official PlayStation2' magazine might be having a joke.

"They start off with a kind of primitive version where people were off wandering around conducting quests but now with Morrow Wind and Never Winter at Night and Dark Age of Camelot, people are in there creating characters and building up the characters to the point where if they build up a character with enough points they'll sell it on eBay."
Zap2it.com's transcription machine seems to have gone awry after they interviewed Hollywood's Robin Williams.

03 Kitty cup

Japan: Another combination of **Edge**'s favourite things arrived this month in the shape of news that Sanriotown.com has had the masterstroke of combining Hello Kitty and football. In a global first for the franchise, the company has developed the first ever Hello Kitty PC game featuring a "fully animated 3D Hello Kitty playing soccer in a virtual soccer field with humans." It even features Kitty's friends, My Melody, Mina No Tabo, Pochacco and Bad Badtz-Maru in the cheerleader team. A limited edition version of the game will come with a *Hello Kitty Football Cup* boot bag and football top, but even the standard version comes attractively packaged in a 'fancy game box'.

04 Ping pong Korean style

Korea: ECTS wouldn't be complete without a few daft Korean sideshows. But this year, one coin-op displayed a great deal of eastern promise. Developed by Netdol Entertainment, *Live Action PingPong* uses wireless 'body-feeling' technology to sense the motions of players holding specially designed bats. Although there are computer opponents such as Mcsiz, ("A secret agent… he puts on casual wear not to disclose his identity.") showgoers were having much more fun playing with each other. Indeed, the game was so good it went on to secure the ECTS Best Multiplayer Game award. The sight of the Netdol reps performing victory celebrations on the stage (20 minutes after everyone else had left for the bar) was in itself worth turning up for.

05 Specs appeal

Japan: The type of future envisaged by the likes of 'Disclosure' and 'The Lawnmower Man' may yet become a reality thanks to Sony, which has just released a special head-mounted display in Japan. At a mere ¥59,800 (£320), the lightweight headset, which can detect head movements and is compatible with PlayStation2 looks like a bit of a steal. The effect of the unit's LCD display and its 180,000 pixels is apparently akin to watching a 42-inch screen from a distance of two metres, though sadly Sony doesn't intend to launch the product overseas. Nevertheless, it's available from the Japanese PlayStation.com online shop, and compatible software will be unveiled "soon by some vendors."

Data Stream

Amount raised for charity by Game's auction of in-store orcs: **£20,000**

Revenue generated by wireless gaming in 2003 according to 'Screen Digest': **£1.7bn**

Revenue generated by online console gaming in 2003 according to 'Screen Digest': **£1.4bn**

Revenue generated by online PC gaming in 2003 according to 'Screen Digest': **£160m**

Number of WAP user sessions recorded by Digital Bridges in the past 18 months: **over 10 million**

Cumulative length of these user sessions: **71.4 million minutes**

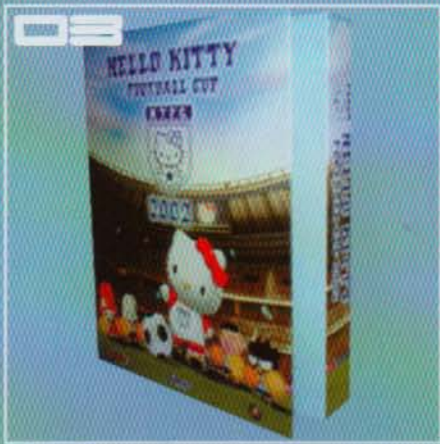
Number of subscribers to Square's PlayOnline service: **120,000**

Number of additional subscribers needed for profitability according to Square president Yoichi Wada: **80,000**

Number of *Ikaruga* copies sold in Japan during its first week on sale: **13,900**

Number of copies of *Mario Sunshine* sold in the same week: **12,080**

Latest confirmed release date for *The Getaway*: **December 6**

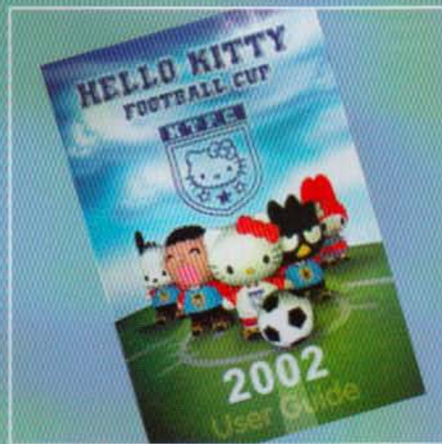




Konami's spell at the top of the Premier League is over. *HK* puts the cute in… f-cute-ball. Or something



From left to right: My Melody, Pochacco, Mina No Tabo and the sulky, irrepressible Bad Badzt-Maru







You can pay good money for multiplayer ping pong in Korea. But don't expect this in a pub near you



Sony's VR technology is impressive, but will there be enough good games to support the device?



The future is now. The new head-mounted display let's you get down with the kidz for just £320

06





At great expense Sega created *Dragon Chronicle*. Good job it's not as brown as *Reign of Fire*, then

07





The rather fetching special edition of *Final Fantasy XI*. Wonder if there's a copy on Lupin Kojima's shelf?

08





The industry has grown up. Grown up so much that it needs cheap models to promote *Aggressive Inline*



Sorry to come over all Mary Whitehouse, but does Criterion need *Burnout 2* marketing of this calibre?



Positive *Turok Evolution* quotes must be hard to come by. So, why not just write them yourself?

06 Is that a dragon in your pocket?

Japan: Inspired by Sega's success with elaborate arcade cabinets and stylish memory cards, Namco will be releasing its own entry, *Dragon Chronicle*, this winter. Consisting of spaces for up to four players and a giant central screen, two units can link up to provide eightplayer card contests. The game itself is a *Digimon*-style combination of tender nurture and nasty combat, but after choosing one of six elements for their dragon avatars, players can store their characteristics on memory cards illustrated with one of 500 images. Whether it's enough to revive the arcade industry remains to be seen though.

07 Final Fantasy pack

Japan: In an example of shameless profiteering that almost rivals New Line Cinema's multi-tiered 'Lord of the Rings' DVD release, Square has released a limited edition version of *Final Fantasy XI*. However, in this case, it's almost justifiable since it does feature a rather lavish box design, courtesy of Yoshitako Amano. It should also obviate the need to download any of the patches that have been released since the game's launch. It's on sale at the rather reasonable price of ¥7,900 (£40).

08 Marketing ruse 'Rumbled'

UK: Edge has already drawn attention to the Acclaim-sponsored 'magazine' 'Rumbled', but since discovering that the company has been using pull-quotes on its *Turok* marketing materials, we thought it worthy of another mention. 'Highlights' include UK BMX rider Zac Shaw droning on about his XXX lifestyle; a double-page, lesbian-themed photoshoot drawing attention to the fully animated breasts featured in *Aggressive Inline*; and, in a *Burnout 2* promo piece, a list of the ten most famous crashes – including those of Ayrton Senna and Princess Diana. Does the industry really need this?

Continue

Rage, and specifically *Rocky*
If he dies, he dies

Geek meets
We didn't meet on the Internet

The Greek courts
For reinstating videogames. Yay

Quit

Internet chancers
Scanning magazines before subscribers get their copies

nVidia's ECTS dancing girls
They didn't stop for three days

The Greek courts
For attempting to outlaw videogames. Boo

OUT THERE
MEDIA

09 I, Cyborg

For some people Kevin Warwick, professor of cybernetics at Reading University, is the vanguard of the next step in human evolution, to others he's a one-man publicity machine driven by a crackpot scientistic philosophy. Somewhere in the middle sits the view that he's simply a bloke with a propensity for sticking bits of machines in himself. And despite the gung-ho attitude of 'I, Cyborg', this seems to be best description of his activities.

The book itself is partly autobiographical, covering the early years, before detailing his two major cybernetic experiments. The first in 1998, saw a transponder implanted into Warwick's arm which allowed his movements to be monitored in a smart building, enabling it to open doors and switch on lights. More important, however, was his 2002 experiment in which a microelectrode array was directly connected to the nerves in his left wrist. Using this, Warwick was able to do more meaningful things such as manipulate a robotic hand through his hand movements.

But controversy surrounds the conclusions he derives from these experiments. While his supporters, sensibly, play up the medical implications to repair damaged nerves for paraplegics, Warwick sees himself as a pioneer of a new race of human-machines which will eventually take over the running of the world, thanks to their enhanced brains and bodies. It's an incredibly culturally-naive view of how science is used in society, of course, but for readers who can filter out the nonsense, and Warwick's terrible writing style, 'I, Cyborg' raises some interesting issues.

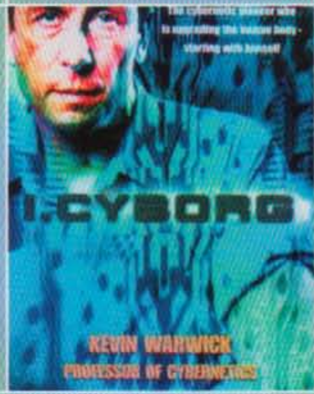
10 What Just Happened

Books chronicling the interaction between the Internet and wider culture are plentiful. But while the current vogue is a rash of wise-after-the-event tomes hyping business aspects of the dot bomb phenomenon, James Gleick's vision is broader and more thoughtful. Thankfully the author of 'Chaos', 'Faster' and 'Genius', the last a biography of physicist Richard Feynman, is interested in the human dimension of society's increasing reliance on technology. It makes 'What Just Happened' a breath of fresh air in a genre which too often concentrates on the thing rather than its context.

Culled from Gleick's journalism, the articles range from a hilarious 1992 account of trying to use Microsoft's Word for Windows version 1.0, through the Internet explosion of the mid-to-late-'90s and into the wireless network years of 2000 and 2001. Despite the shift of technology encompassed by that period ("If you are using a 14,400-baud modem, you are among the lucky elite," Gleick remarks back in 1994) his fundamental concerns remain the same; what's the role of community in the networked world, and can or should the individual retain privacy? On the way he also touches upon the sociology of passwords, banner ads, digital cash, Y2K, spam emails and eBay. Another long-running pet topic is Microsoft, with various musings addressing the harm inflicted by its monopolistic position. For example, Gleick reveals that the company doesn't allow its technical support operators to use the word 'bug'. Apparently the phrase 'known issue' is preferred. And it's this attention to detail that makes 'What Just Happened' so readable.

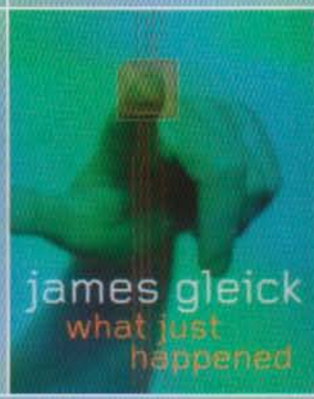
09

Author: **Kevin Warwick**
Publisher: **Century**
ISBN: **0 7126 6988 4**



10

Author: **James Gleick**
Publisher: **Abacus**
ISBN: **0 349 11538 9**



11



Site: **Sega.com's Vault**
URL: **http://www.sega.com/vault/home_vault.jhtml**

11 Website of the month

E116 has been a bit of a renaissance issue for Sega, what with the DC's Ikarugian resurrection and the (mostly) triumphant return of *Super Monkey Ball 2*. A decent enough time, then, to point the way to Sega.com's vault, a US site which carries screenshots, movies, and games relating to upcoming Sega releases. As ever it's the games **Edge** is particularly interested in, since the site is currently hosting flash versions of three of *SMB2*'s minigames: Baseball, Target and Bowling. It's not as good as the real thing, sure – but then it's a lot easier to get away with playing this version at work. Unless you work for **Edge**, of course.

12 Advertainment

Japan: How do you make an ad about a golf game seem exciting? Especially in Japan where *Minna no Golf 3* is about the millionth one to hit the market. Well, you could try a joke, but don't blame us if something's been lost in the translation…



The PS2 logo appears before cutting to a kitchen scene.



"Hey, you!" exclaims father from doorway. "I bought *Minna no Golf 3* and thought it would cost me ¥4,980."



Child and grandfather look on perplexed. "But, in fact it, was only San Kyu Pa!"



They laugh at the joke (San Kyu Pa translates as ¥3,980). "Here son, have the ¥1,000 as pocket money."



"Thank you, Pa!" enthuses the son before hugging his dad. The ad then cuts to images of the game…



The price of *Minna no Golf 3* is prominently displayed.



"Here for you, too." Grandfather offers his son ¥1,000. "Thank you, Pa!" Everyone is happy as ad dissolves.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

World domination: it's a marathon not a sprint

A fraction over two years ago, the BBC's 'The Money Programme' took a look at the games industry. Smartly entitled 'Gamewars', because it was, like, about a 'war' over 'games', the programme was mostly forgettable, a reasonably vacuous look at an industry about to head into its traditional transitory recession. In fact, RedEye remembers just two things; the embarrassingly epileptic way the presenter twisted the pad pretending to play PlayStation, and one J Allard.

J. It requires a certain type of person to abuse standard naming conventions – that sort of self-imposed cool forms preconceptions that are difficult to live up to – and RedEye's only previous J was in 5ive (Gemini, 5'10, likes Chinese and Italian food). Allard is not boyband material, though he did his best to convince us he might be. We got him skating down a carpeted corridor deep inside Microsoft's Redmond HQ. We saw him cruising bars, late at night, chatting to twentysomethings and looking for videogame inspiration; giggling when they suggested adult content; "Hey, It's Xbox, not XXXbox!!!" We saw him twitch gaming, loved-up on *Robotron*.

And to hell with his smugness, what's to hate in a guy who loves *Robotron*, or one who's so polite, affable, perfectly prepared to give credit to his competitors? "How can anyone be down on some of the classic SNES games? I still play *Robotron* every week," he would later non sequitur in a Webchat). But when it came to the money shot on 'The Money Programme', the eyes turned dark and the MS ethos came to the fore. "We are an incredibly competitive bunch of people," said J, his sinister expression alluding to the giant army of winged robot monkeys Microsoft is training in RedEye's head, "And we have a saying that second place is the first loser." Interesting. So that would make Microsoft first loser in the States, J, second loser in Europe, and RedEye's not even sure it's going to finish the race in Japan. Game Over, thanks for playing. Winners don't do drugs.

It doesn't matter. It's two years after Allard announced the pregnancy, it is one year after the birth gave **Edge** a four-star rude awakening, and Microsoft has resorted to buying developers wholesale to keep the flow of desirable titles coming. It is little wonder the prospect of *Kameo* and *Perfect Dark Zero* seemed so appealing, because Rare's reputation for single-format glory gives the Xbox schedule the prospect of something that, at the moment, it sorely lacks: new, must-have games you can't get elsewhere. At the moment the lime green tastes less of electricity and more of desperation, but it doesn't matter. The Xbox is fast becoming RedEye's favourite system ever, no thanks to Microsoft, and all credit to the community. Surprise! It turns out that it's a stable PC in a box after all, and it has taken hackers no time at all to reduce it to that, and a year for RedEye to discover MameX. Oh, J. Oh, God.

RedEye's chip arrived on Monday morning, was installed by Monday afternoon, and by Monday night RedEye was rid of one of his last reasons to persist with desktop PC gaming. MameX is beautiful, simple and, like all the best things, MameX takes place on a plush rug by an open log fire with a widescreen TV throwing filthy images at your retina. It is a history lesson that everyone should experience and it is almost criminal that Microsoft is doing everything in its power to prevent its distribution and execution. Of course, it is well within its legal rights to do so, but in RedEye's head – with the red-eyed monkeys and metal claws and secret island bases – it is criminal, and come the revolution…

"The lime green tastes less of electricity and more of desperation, but it doesn't matter. The Xbox is fast becoming RedEye's favourite system ever"

Feverish premonitions to one side, some time ago Allard listed his favourite games as follows: "*Robotron, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, Mario 64, Zork, Galaga, Wipeout, Gran Turismo, GPI, Drol, Crazy Climber, Unreal Tournament, Crash Bandicoot* series, *Sonic* Series, *Olympic Decathalon*." It is a strange kind of beautiful that the American dreamer can play most of these on his fantasy machine today, right now, and that within a year miscellaneous underground hacktivity will expect to see them all on Xbox in some (illegal) form. So why, then, do J (Allard, not the Gemini with the eyebrow piercing) and his pals seem so eager to stop the industrious emulation community?

If home dev persuades gamers to buy an Xbox, to install MameX, and the hundreds of romz that they already own and have legal right to use – and Microsoft cannot be responsible for the cads that don't adhere to ludicrous (and mostly unenforced) copyright legislation – then it has to be good for Allard and co. Microsoft can cry piracy, but it will cost millions to create another form of uncrackable protection that will be cracked in a week. It would be much more economic for it to sponsor the police and persuade law enforcement to crack down on career pirates at markets and car boot sales. But whatever, obscene amounts of piracy never harmed the PlayStation.

Besides, RedEye doesn't believe this really was the money shot. This was about getting the box into the frame, the consciousness; past the poker faces and bright eyes, Xbox was the primer, and people are primed. It'll probably be in the second race; here, the first race is lost, and this late, advertising for a security officer to wipe the chipping scum from the face of the Xbox Earth is like trying to close the casing after RedEye's copy protection has bolted.

Still, it doesn't really matter: if Microsoft's new recruit manages to disable new games from working on RedEye's old Xbox, he will buy a new one – presuming, of course, that any of those new games are anywhere near as desirable as the marvellous *Halo*. Given that hardware is sold at a self-esteem threatening loss, that may well hurt Microsoft a little, but it will not hurt RedEye because £150 is a good price for 20 years of arcade history in your front room. Allard, presuming that the twitch gaming wasn't just an act to be down with the investors, would probably agree. After all, check the wild clutching at straws here, courtesy of the Xbox's biggest evangelist in an interview with Website Gamespot 18 months ago, "*Nightcaster* is a dual analogue game. Players control the main character with the left joystick. However, the right joystick can be used to aim spells… " he says; lust, hope, desperation, you know what's coming next, "… like in *Robotron*". Hah. If only.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Aesthetics: the videogame industry needs its own style



Okay, I admit it. When screenshots first appeared, I was one of those people who didn't like the new cel-shaded *Zelda* look. After the granular gorgeousness of *Ocarina of Time* (the grass in Hyrule field is still my favourite videogame grass ever, because it has a stylisation that *Halo*'s hyperrealistic grass lacks), the pictures of cel-shaded Link left me distinctly underwhelmed. Yes, it looks like a cartoon; but, look, I'm no avid consumer of cartoons. 'South Park's combination of acerbic script and deliberately lo-fi animation is wonderful, but the flat perfection of this left me cold.

And then I finally got to play a bit of it, a mini-game involving a sailboat jumping over barrels and, of course, it was glorious. We all know that you shouldn't judge a game on static aesthetics alone, but sometimes it helps to be reminded of just how pointless that attitude can be. Nevertheless, one wonders just how far this fad can be taken.

For there is an increasing aesthetic schism in videogames, between those that strive for visual naturalism and those that flee it. Blame *Jet Grind Radio*, if you like, but the second constituency seems these days to have nearly as much of a herd mentality as the first. There is still mileage in adding cel-shading to a genre that previously has not experienced it – and the impressive networked play of *Auto Modellista* vindicates this sort of surprise value – but it is already as much of a cliché as pointy realism itself. And quite apart from the games' inherent merits, there is an unavoidable publicity problem with this visual style. Johnny Massmarket, bless him, is going to see shots of GameCube Zelda, and is only going to have his prejudice that Nintendo is for kids reinforced.

The major problem with this visual style is that it is too close to something we are already familiar with from other forms of entertainment. You might call it a craven sort of Disney envy. Isn't it more admirable to invent a kind of representation that only a videogame could handle, in order to stake out the unique aesthetic territory for our form? But between the two extremist camps already mentioned – naturalism versus cel-shaded Disney envy – lies a third way, which one might call naturalistic fantasy. In some regards it is this that may be the most promising as a tradition to build on, and for reasons that run deeper than the solely aesthetic.

It is exemplified, for instance, by *TimeSplitters2*, with its detailed, pseudorealistic environments populated by heavily stylised characters. Again, to see the game in action dispels any doubts one might have had about the aesthetics, particularly when one experiences the top-class animation. One of my main criticisms of *TimeSplitters* was the lack of blood, but Free Radical has improved the feedback given to the player on a successful shot to such an extent – with reactive postures of localised pain, slumps and falls and an especially satisfying diagonal spin through the air – that one doesn't miss the gore at all. The game is constantly, avidly rewarding the player's actions with engaging audiovisual responses to a degree that few other FPSs can manage.

But perhaps the most useful virtues of this form of representation are the political ones. The criticisms of violence in videogames, however misguided the cognoscenti may think them, are not going to go away. The recent release of the *America's Army* games, an extraordinary PR project by the US military, only exemplifies the problems such games have in the current edgy climate if they try naturalistic representation, because the lack of any blood at all – so that the game can be marketed to teenagers for propaganda purposes – looks ridiculous in the context of what claims to be the most realistic simulation of combat ever made. Certainly the idea of showing school-age consumers exactly how accurately-modelled US-issue weaponry works, and schooling them in commando tactics, has elicited off-the-record condemnations by some commentators close to the American military. Furthermore, one might wonder just how good an idea it is to code all this realistic information into a game that is freely accessible for download. It doesn't take much to imagine members of al-Qaida taking more than an academic interest.

"Between the two camps – naturalism versus cel-shaded Disney envy – lies a third way, which one might call naturalistic fantasy"

Such, then, are the political – not just aesthetic – deficits of the pseudo-photorealistic visual style. If you are going to pursue a violent, realistic course, you had better make sure either that it features nagging inconsistencies such as a lack of blood, or that the player's opponents are zombies, demons or aliens, so that you can claim your game features only 'fantasy violence', unless you want your audience to be limited by ratings boards. My NTSC copy of *Metal Gear Solid 2* is rated 'Mature', and if this didn't limit the game's success owing to the laxity of current ratings enforcement, we can be sure that such enforcement will be more vigorously pursued in the future. In this sense the videogame industry appears to be going the same way as Hollywood, where nearly every major studio release is dumbed down or sanitised so as to receive the new 12A rating, and thus ensure maximum box-office returns.

If this is an inevitable consequence of videogames attaining a massmarket entertainment status, which development on the whole can only be good for the industry, it might not be such a bad thing, in that it might force designers to take a more structured and coherent approach to the imaginative design of their visuals. *TimeSplitters2* and *Ico*, to take two of the more outstanding examples, do not look like cartoons; but neither do they try to look like action movies. Because *TimeSplitters2* eschews gore, it has made more efforts in terms of character design and animation, with the result that its zombies, for instance, are to my mind more frightening than your *The House of the Dead* or *Biohazard* zombies, even while they retain an undercurrent of friendly comedy. Furthermore, these games do not feature the tired species of twee elves and predictable monsters that have traditionally been associated with this form of representation: I have nothing against elves and monsters per se, but there are few that are not reminiscent of thousands of others, in hundreds of other games.

Between the extremes of photorealism and cartoon there lies a vast landscape of aesthetic possibility which, paradoxically, was far more well populated 20 years ago than it is now, owing to the abstract stylisation enforced by hardware limitations. It must be time to map this territory anew.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

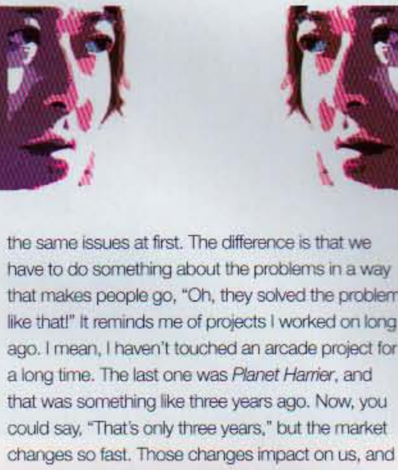
As you may know, I'm working with Nintendo on *F-Zero*: the development and game design is being handled by Amusement Vision, under Nintendo's supervision. This project presents lots of challenges, as we're producing two versions, one for the consumer and another for the arcade. Both will interact via a data link, and more.

Now, making an arcade game run on consumer hardware is nothing new for me; I have quite a lot of experience in that field. But this time the process is different, because I am developing both versions at the same time. That creates a lot of questions, many moments of hesitation. Of course, it is still too early to speak in detail about our plans for this game, but already I hear people wondering, "What is going to happen about this?" Or, "How will they avoid this problem," and so on. I guess I'm wondering as well.

You don't understand what I mean? It's simple. Professionals and consumers both wonder about the same issues at first. The difference is that we have to do something about the problems in a way that makes people go, "Oh, they solved the problem like that!" It reminds me of projects I worked on long ago. I mean, I haven't touched an arcade project for a long time. The last one was *Planet Harrier*, and that was something like three years ago. Now, you could say, "That's only three years," but the market changes so fast. Those changes impact on us, and we have to evolve with them. I go to the arcade and see the changes for myself, and I can't help being surprised – even when you know things change, you can still be amazed. I think the feeling is even more acute because I'm now involved in an arcade project. I guess the way you look at something differs according to your own perspective.

So, what are the big changes? Well, in the first place, traditional coin-op titles are declining – the machines where you put in ¥100 coins and play until it's Game Over. On the other hand, games with interesting options are getting more popular in the arcades. For example, there's the Net service. This first appeared *Virtua Fighter 4*, and allows you access to a service via mobile phones. At the end of your game, you can see your place in nationwide rankings. Even better, you can communicate with other players, and swap advice, and so on. Now, this was a very ambitious service and new things always cause fear. Operators have to install a line to allow network features. That was unnecessary before. It was a risk but it rapidly became a key factor to success. Now operators understand the importance of installing such a line, and as more install it, so its popularity grows, as do profits.

Another important element is the introduction of cards. We can put them in two categories: magnetic and IC. Magnetic ones are read only. That means you buy one, put it in the reader and the game uses the character information from it. If you want to use more information, you need to buy another card. The other solution is the IC card, which is both read and write capable. Here, the game stores information on the card after you've played. Now, if you go back to the game a few days later, you can resume playing from where you left off, or save data from arcade rivals on your card, and so on. It's nothing less than the memory card concept, taken from the consumer and applied to the arcade.



AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Arcades: learning to evolve and surprise

Just like the Net service, the operators do not view this as a risk-free feature. They have to install vending machines and keep them maintained. And then there are more things to go wrong with the machines: claims from users such as, "The game cannot read the card," and so on. They were afraid, but the fear disappears in face of the popularity of these features, especially when they're associated with strong arcade brands.

"Traditional coin-op titles are declining. On the other hand, games with interesting options are getting more popular in the arcades"

The way people enjoy the arcade has changed completely using these technologies. You can raise a horse and regularly race it in *Derby Owners Club*. You can buy trading cards of famous footballers, manage them in realtime and watch the direct effect on the play onscreen in *World Club Champion Football*. Even better, racing fans can customise their cars, and store all their data on the card, or leave a championship at some point in the scenario to resume it later, another day. That's in *Initial D Arcade Stage*, which is very popular right now in the arcade. Oh, and don't forget *Virtua Fighter 4*.

More companies are now adopting ways developed by Sega. Konami is bringing *Winning Eleven* to the arcade with a card system and other options. Sega has announced an arcade network mahjong game, based on *VF4* Net system, enabling people to do battle nationwide – and now Konami is developing its own too. You see? The change is happening right across the arcade industry. In the near future it will be easier to count the games without these functions, and of these, the games that are still successful will be even fewer.

So what happens to the games that invested in other forms of technology? I mean the ones based on music, such as *Samba de Amigo* or *Taiko no Tatsujin*, or lightgun shooting, or cabinet driving games? The current path of evolution is not favourable to them. And that brings me to this: I want to do something great here. I can't give details because my ideas are not well enough organised yet, and I don't want you to misunderstand my initiative. But I would like to develop the kind of game you experience with all your body, to release it on the market, to see what people's reactions are.

That kind of game was very popular 15 years ago. Sega released titles such as *OutRun* or *After Burner* with unique cabinets, and rival companies developed their own titles to meet us. That was the trend at that time, but people who enjoyed these times are now 30-plus. What about the kids of that era, those who learned about videogames with the Famicom? Didn't they visit game centres too? No, because, at that time, there was a law in Japan preventing junior school children from going to the arcades. Even high schools limited the time for games or even prohibited their use, so, while the Famicom generation were aware of arcades, they weren't allowed in them.

The problem is that by the time they reached 16, the arcades were struggling with cost-reduction issues, the unique cabinets were disappearing, and the arcade industry's flame was fading. Sure, you'd find music games, dance games, but those that put you entirely inside the videogame… they were gone. I want to revive this experience. Why? Simple: it is great! So count on me, I'll be back with a surprise.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Hello, **Edge** readers. This month I've managed to break away from my favourite game – I think you will understand which one I mean – and I'd like to tell you something about the videogame industry in Japan. In particular, I'd like to talk about an Xbox game; something quite unusual over here these days, as I'm sure you've heard. The game I'd like to talk about is *Dead or Alive Xtreme Volleyball*. Well, if it wasn't going to be about my favourite game, it had to be about girls, didn't it? Ha ha.

But before we get to that point, I need to tell you about my theory. If videogames are changing, it is important to make changes in the way they are shown, too. I work for a magazine in Japan called 'Game Wave DVD'. It is not produced on paper, but on DVD, and it's becoming quite successful. Interestingly, it is about to undergo some very exciting changes – but, and this is extremely frustrating for me, I am not allowed to tell you about them just yet.

'Game Wave DVD' started when I was 26. Back then, PlayStation2's sales figures had just passed through the four million units mark. At this time, the magazine wasn't selling very well but I, just like everyone else in the company, was sure the idea of producing a magazine on a DVD was a great one. And, even though the sales were not as good as we had previously hoped, we were very excited and worked a lot to improve the magazine. Of course, we still do that now, even though we're much more successful.

Anyway, back when I was 25, I worked for a different magazine, called 'Weekly Famitsu'. My speciality, or at least those games that I was most passionate about, were fighting and action games. A lot of the time I was asked to write articles and strategy guides about these kinds of videogames. Now, the layout of Japanese videogame magazines is intricate and precise. Many articles fit on a single page, with the text and screenshots compressed into as small a space as possible.

Furthermore, they often concentrate on a very specific aspect of the game. In the case of fighting, action or racing games, you might find a full sequence of screenshots describing one single action, a course, or maybe a very detailed description of the consequence of one attack and its possible counter.

Whatever, everything is usually put on a single page, static. I thought something was wrong. I used to work in silence, without saying anything. It was just work – not my place to say anything – but as time passed, the feeling grew, and I started to think that what we were doing was was wrong, and somehow inappropriate for our subject matter.

Here was the question that I kept asking, over and over again: isn't it possible to publish motion and not only pictures? The motivation behind publishing a gaming magazine on a DVD is very simple. It allows us to offer something completely different, something greater; not only still pictures and text but movement in high-quality video. There can be no confusion on the part of the consumer, because they see things simply as they are. It allows us to show the violent kinetics of a game in full flow, for readers to get an idea of just how fun a game is to play much more accurately.

Of course, some people hate that idea. They believe that we are revealing some aspect of the game they would prefer to discover by themselves – that we are showing too much. But in my opinion, it's the only way to present a videogame fairly. And, more than that, it's the best way to explain how to pass some obstacles, or to show other gamers very impressive, often spectacular sequences with the help of 'professional gamers'. Those are the reasons why I left 'Weekly Famitsu' to work on 'Game Wave DVD', why I sometimes sleep under my desk, why I am so passionate about this DVD videogame magazine. It's the media I dreamed of for some time.

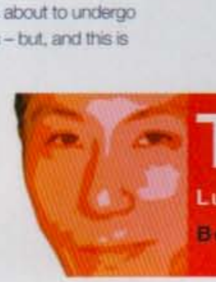
But what about the girls? Well, recently, Tecmo's Mr Itagaki came by to my office to show us the very first video of *Dead or Alive Xtreme Volleyball*. As soon as the tape started rolling I was so sure that there is a bright future for videogames. But at the same time, I realised that our DVD videogame magazine is going become much more central to the videogame industry in the coming years. After viewing the video, I asked Itagaki-san if it would be possible to include in our DVD. He was delighted to offer us that opportunity, and provided us with a superb uncut video that we were able to publish.

Now, we have just found out that this has had a tremendous impact on our sales. Our magazine is still reasonably young, but still, this video was responsible for a historic sales record in our short history. Why? Because rendering nice young ladies in 3D and in motion is very difficult. If you don't construct each model in detail you get a very disappointing result, far from realistic, far from attractive, far from alive. If you do too much detail, you lose the characters' souls, and produce something technically beautiful, incredible CG, but once again, something not alive.

However, Itagaki-san's leadership at Team Ninja has brought about the creation of perfectly rendered and animated characters, lovely, beautiful, computer-generated ladies. From the first introduction of the game in 'Weekly Famitsu', the first set of screenshots, we heard more and more people pleading for video footage of the game. So that's why I was convinced that this particular issue of 'Game Wave DVD' would sell very well, a long time before Itagaki-san gave us the opportunity to show off his creation. I was pleased he did.

Hardware is changing, improving all the time, and creators are able to deliver ever more impressive titles. So, people like us, supporting the industry by showing off the wonderful games that the developers offer to us, have to think every day of better ways of doing so. If we don't, there will come a time when games stop selling and then the magazines will stop selling too.

We have to think about better ways of communicating the fun of videogames to the people. I've spent a lot of time recently thinking about my role in the industry, about the spirit of videogame magazine writers, and about pretty virtual girls. That's my September Tokyo Game Life.



TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Beautiful girls, moving: Kojima-san's in DVD heaven

"The motivation behind publishing a magazine on a DVD is very simple. It allows us to offer something completely different, something greater"

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

prescreen

Incoming electronic entertainment from across the globe

Edge's most wanted

Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island

Think about it. Those colourful environments, those lovely characters, that superlative gameplay, NCL's design genius – all of it on that tiny portable screen.



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

GTA: Vice City

It might be little more than an expansion pack, but it's an expansion pack to an excellent game. And it has Flock of Seagulls soundtracking multiple homicide.



(PlayStation2) Rockstar

F-Zero

Nagoshi-san's hints in AV Out have got us wondering. Will it be a plush cabinet? Online play between arcade and home? Unlockable F-Zero Bowling and Target?



(GameCube) Nintendo

Blinx: The Time Sweeper

The concept is still marvellously refreshing and wonderfully appealing. The aesthetic is still beautifully realised. The character is still remarkably hideous.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Hard cel

Imagination versus authenticity

Face it, cel-shading is dead. So is 2D. And the less said about console strategy titles the better. Although the odd Japanese softco will take a punt with a game genre which is on the way out – Treasure with *Ikaruga*, for instance – in general, you won't find any publisher in the west ploughing money into anything that's perceived as old skool or too avant-garde for a mainstream audience.

You can see the whole sorry process happening in any EB around the country. "What's that?" enquires one spotty teenager of an EB employee while he watches Beat glide down the telegraph wires of Rokkaku-dai Heights on the screen of an Xbox demo pod. "*Jet Set Radio Future*," replies the assistant. "Oh, right. Looks shit." Imagine the damage that is done when an Infogrames product manager hears such comments.

But Infogrames' decision to discontinue *Jet Set Radio Future* from retail is not down to the odd negative comment or focus grouping, it's because of poor sales. Pure and simple. Cel-shading may be the most exciting thing to happen in videogame visuals for nearly a decade, but most punters just see something a little too abstract for them to fully connect with. Expect *Auto Modellista* to experience a similarly rough ride when it's released in the west – and not just because of poor handling characteristics (tweaking is still a possibility).

The failure of cel-shading to make cash registers ring the world over represents a wider issue: the drive towards realism. Science fiction and fantasy settings will always be popular amongst a certain type of videogamer (especially on PC) but if you truly want massmarket success then you need something that consumers can instantly relate to. Sure, *Medal of Honor Frontline* received a big marketing push, but it was the 'real-world' authenticity that really helped its chart success. *Halo*, with its needler darts flashing from strange architecture, outlandish enemies and alien landscapes could not compete. Because that takes a leap of imagination.

Of course, cel-shading won't disappear overnight, but the battering *Zelda* has received over the last 18 months will even be enough to make Nintendo think twice about using the technique in future projects. Hopefully, enough consumers will overcome their preconceptions about 'kiddie' imagery to give such games a fighting chance.













Brute Force (Xbox) p032

Red Faction II (PS2) p034

Clock Tower 3 (PS2) p035

Kid Ninja (PS2, Xbox, GC) p036

Warhammer Online (PC) p037

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Brute Force

Edge doesn't advocate physical violence, but will Brute Force be enough to convince those who won't buy an Xbox for Halo?







Part of the irritation in *Brute Force* stems from the fact that, at times, it plays like a PC shooter. Bullets come from nowhere, but the control system is too sluggish to let players scan, locate and eliminate their targets



The Aztec architecture in the demo looks lush, but the thirdperson view provides jarring moments when the characters fail to move smoothly past some structures. It also makes for a less involving experience

Brute Force may not be using *Halo*'s engine – though it's completely conceivable that Microsoft's ownership of Bungie gives it the right to ease the pain of development for its other firstparty development teams – but it certainly looks like it's built from the same fundamental blocks as Bungie's essential Xbox title, and with some of the same beliefs, not least the control system, which is as identical as you could hope for. These are both positive things. What self-respecting action adventure wouldn't want the look or feel of *Halo*, and who wouldn't want the transition between titles to be as smooth as possible? But there are few other positive things in this preview.

A thirdperson squad-based action sci-fi adventure which requires the player to progress through ludicrously beautiful levels and eliminate hostile forces, *Brute Force* rarely appears to have any enthusiasm to escape the adjectives at the start of this sentence. Brutally, it plays almost exactly as you'd expect – close your eyes and imagine bounding across open land and dark corridors, seeing your character start to bleed and yelp, and responding with fire in the direction of a red dot. Of course, charlatans could apply the same tired, clinical description to *Halo* but to do so would be to ignore Bungie's nuances of play, of control, of design. At this stage, Digital Anvil's work appears to lack all three.

Which isn't to say it doesn't show promise. The game allows the player to switch between four characters (Tex, Flint, Brutus and Hawk), each of whom possesses a different skill. These skills, activated with the white button on the Xbox pad, last for a set length of time then fade and recharge.

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Digital Anvil**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**112



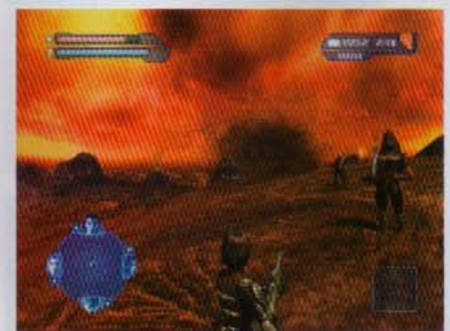








Like *Halo*, *Brute Force* does grass exceptionally well. If things don't improve, this may be Edge's box quote



The blue display in the bottom left corner of the screen serves as a scanner and provides data on your team members, who can be controlled with swift and intuitive movement of the D-pad

Hawk can become invisible, Flint's speciality lies in sniping accuracy, Tex rampages with two weapons, and the alien Brutus has 'Predator'-style hunting vision that helps locate enemies. Unfortunately, while the time-limited aspect of each is a noble attempt to prevent the player from using them all the time, there's nothing to stop people from just hanging back and waiting for them to recharge. In other words you can pause for 30 seconds every 200 yards and the difficulty curve flatlines.

The most visceral problem, though, is that there is no feeling of consequence when you open fire on an enemy, or when one destroys you from some unseen vantage point. The weapon sonics are lightweight, the reticles lack *Halo*'s delicate auto aim, and the only visible impact bullets have is a splurge of red mist – it might as well be crayon for all the violence it imparts – until the enemy falls over.

"There is no feeling of consequence when you open fire on an enemy, or when one destroys you from some unseen vantage point"

It is eerily reminiscent of another recent mediocre shoot 'em up. There is still some time to go in development, of course, still time remaining for *Brute Force* to fulfil the promise its idea holds, but there is some significant work to do if Digital Anvil is to remove the most damning moment of all; the moment you feel that, despite the borrowed control system and the familiar aesthetic, *Brute Force* feels more *Turok Evolution* than *Halo*.





Command and conquer

Ironically the one thing that appears, at this stage, to be well implemented is the one thing *Halo* didn't offer: squad control. Hitting the black button switches your control between characters, and the D-pad allows you to issue commands to each of them in turn or all of them as a group. Hitting a direction calls up a menu which then lets you select or deselect the characters you want to order, and instruct them to cover you, wait, open fire or head to a visible location.

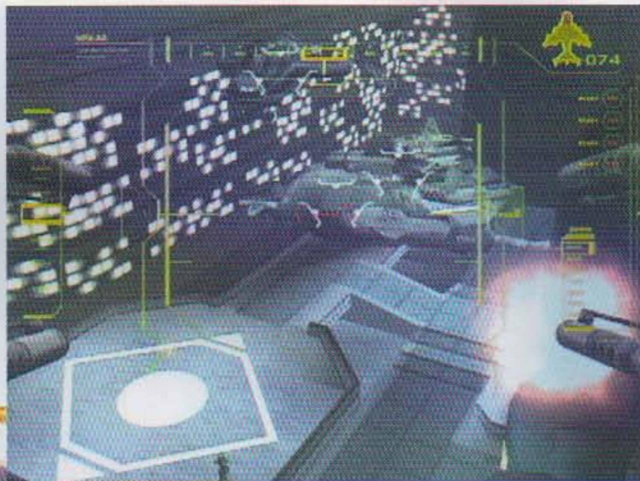
Red Faction II

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Volition**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**112

Vent your aggression on walls in Volition's sequel to the hugely popular Geo-Mod-based blaster













Glass shatters, walls crumble and limbs liquidise under heavy fire. Although the AI is so so, there's no question that you get a visceral thrill from destroying the scenery



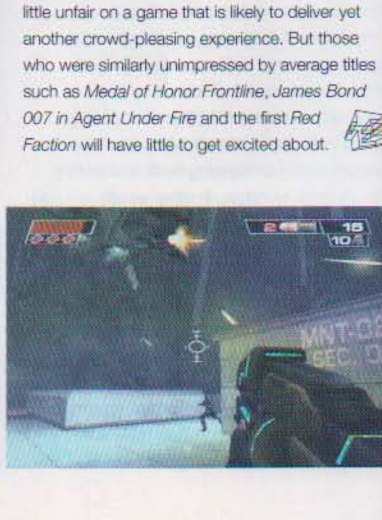
Two little letters that mean a world of difference to good videogames: AI. Two little letters that most developers seem to treat with scorn. Or at least indifference. While they may make all the right noises during early demos of games: "Intelligent pathfinding," they'll chirp; "Group dynamics," they'll enthuse; before finishing off with the coup de grâce, "Emergent behaviour." But mostly it's a smokescreen designed to impresses naive game journos.

The AI in *Red Faction II* is typical of most FPSs. It's not terrible, but it's not great either. It appears that developers are just happy to trot out the same kind of enemy behaviour patterns we've experienced a thousand times before. Punters are used to it, so why spend more time adding layers of sophistication? Indeed, *Red Faction II* is a duck shoot. So why don't we just coin a new term: 'Duck shoot AI'. Because that's what you're getting in everything from *Project IGI* to *Turok Evolution*. You're being short changed.

Enemies in *Red Faction II* come streaming down corridors. They occasionally shoot at you. They may even dodge around a corner if you fire back. In short, they are dumb ducks waiting for a pasting. And that's about as sophisticated as it gets. Perhaps Volition should have concentrated a bit more on this area, rather than designing levels with the occasional bit of scenery that can have holes blasted into it.

Yes, Geo-Mod returns, but the 'revolutionary' environment demolition system appears to be just as circumscribed as it was in the first title. Not that pulverising bits of scenery with grenades isn't fun – there's certainly a great deal of cathartic pleasure to be had out of it. But the verisimilitude is severely compromised when one wall shatters, and another, presumably made of the same 'material', hardly takes a scratch.

This preview has been negative, which is a little unfair on a game that is likely to deliver yet another crowd-pleasing experience. But those who were similarly unimpressed by average titles such as *Medal of Honor Frontline*, *James Bond 007 in Agent Under Fire* and the first *Red Faction* will have little to get excited about.



Clock Tower 3

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Winter (Japan), Spring 2003 (UK)**

Lavender-sniffing, pre-pubescent schoolgirls with a time-travelling bent. It can only be a Capcom survival horror game

It's easy to dismiss *Clock Tower 3* as another customary Capcom survival horror title. The traditional motifs are all present and correct: restorative herbs, objects glimmering on tables and copious backtracking to ferry objects from one location to another. But **Koji Nakajima**, *Clock Tower 3*'s producer, was keen to point out to **Edge** the fundamental difference between this and the *Biohazard* games. "In our game there are no weapons whatsoever," he enthuses. "The main character, Alyssa, must try to avoid fights and we really want to build up the tension in this way."

The bloodthirsty may baulk at such a departure but early evidence suggests that the move makes for a refreshing take on the genre. Indeed, bobby-stockinged Alyssa must outwit opponents by employing 'special' items or simply running away. A fear meter increases when particularly nasty creatures jump out of the shadows, though Nakajima-san promises that no monster will kill Alyssa instantly. Alyssa's movement becomes more erratic if she's scared witless, though lavender plants can be sniffed to restore calm. Hopefully, finding intelligent ways to banish foes, rather than plugging them with bullets will prove compelling rather than frustrating.

The opening level sees the main character transported back in time to London during WWII. Clearly, the player must unravel the mystery surrounding Alyssa's spontaneous time-travelling behaviour. And though Nakajima-san was being somewhat reticent about details, he did reveal that it involves discovering the significance of her paranormal bloodline.

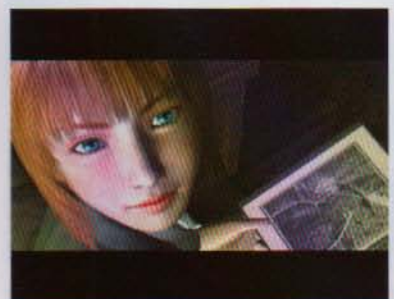
Structurally, it appears that the player must banish one main ghostly enemy on each level. Short cut-scenes give clues to how this can be done, and usually involve helping mortal characters to achieve a particular goal or overcome a fear. In the first level, a schoolgirl is seen practising the piano at the side of her father in preparation for an important competition. Another snapshot then shows the girl crying over some misfortune. It is clear that some tragedy has occurred and only Alyssa has the power to touch their lives and lay their ghost to rest.

Although *Clock Tower 3* bears no relation to the previous two titles, the delicacy of the plot and the emphasis on problem solving rather than gunplay should give it an evocative and distinctive flavour.

















Alyssa gets harassed by apparitions at every turn, and though she can flee in the short term, it is advisable to find a method to lay them to rest. It's more ghost puzzlers than ghost busters

Kid Ninja



AKA Asylum Games' attempt at world domination. If things go to plan, you'll be eating the cereal soon

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Asylum Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**



Early stages, of course, but it's thought the interplay between Kid Ninja and his favourite teddy will be key to both the game's dynamic and the emotional appeal

The one environment **Edge** has seen Kid Ninja exploring is simple and full of high-contrast shading, true to the multimedia cartoon nature of the game's protagoinst. On the right, sketches of two of KN's alter egos

He is tiny, so small he can't leave his bear behind, but Asylum is aiming big. **Jamie Collison**, Asylum's spokesman, illustrates. "We want the character to be one of the most recognisable and best-loved brands in the market for a long time to come," he states. "We're launching him across several mediums, involving cutting edge music, TV, film, comic books and toys." It strikes **Edge** that Asylum is exceptionally ambitious, particularly for a company whose previous work has been almost entirely confined to children's licences.

But for all its hypercute stylings, the London-based developer doesn't see *Kid Ninja* as a kids' game. It's an all-ages thing – "hotter than *Mario Sunshine*," Collison bullishly proposes in an early email to **Edge** – which, in theory, should draw on the cartoon exuberance and presentation expertise it's built up over the years, and blend it with a somewhat deeper gaming experience. At the core is an exploration-based platform beat 'em up, and around that lies *Kid Ninja*'s franchise-friendly narrative strand.

Lead character Jet Woo (*very* clever) is, by day, just your everyday martial arts-obsessed kid. At night, though, he undergoes a transformation into the Kid Ninja. Armed with an inherited mastery of ninjitsu, and with the help of his ever-present toy bear, Jet must battle the evil forces of the Raging Dragon, led by the evil DragonMaster who sends spirits to possess innocents.

Jason White, lead art director, explains more about the gameworld. "It's full of atmosphere, convincing detail," he says. "Pigeons scatter, neon signs flash, street kids spray graffiti. The whole environment is littered with actionable or deformable objects, so you can bounce from tree to car, get a lift on a window-cleaning cradle, hop on the back of a delivery moped, smash through an advertising hoarding, and so on."

Kid Ninja also possesses the handy ability to transform into different creatures with some kind of non-specific magical ninja power, an aspect which should prove lucrative when it comes to the non-interactive elements of Asylum's prospective media-straddling franchise.



Warhammer Online

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Games Workshop**
Developer: **Climax**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **2004**
Previously **E94**

The evocative Warhammer universe is coming to a PC near you, only this time you can leave your many-sided dice in that jewel-encrusted box

It's so unfair to make fun of people who congregate in Games Workshop outlets. But let's face it, they are easy targets. They're the sort of people who always carry around a ruler in their back pocket and can produce a polyhedral dice upon request. Not that Climax is complaining, because they're also tremendously loyal people. The sort of people who will play *Warhammer Online* whether it's good or not.

But those who are a bit intimidated by the youth club atmosphere of said outlets can rest assured that *Warhammer Online* is shaping up to be a very accomplished game indeed. The game goes back to basics and is set in a part of the *Warhammer* world first developed some 20 years ago. Visually, it's absolutely beautiful and there's a real sense that you've entered an alien, but completely cohesive, universe. Climax has attempted to throw out all the inconsistencies that break the sense of 'reality' in games such as *EverQuest*. There's no teleporting items from one side of the world to the other, or carrying an endless supply of objects in a tiny haversack.

There are stats in the game, but they are kept in the background as much as possible. If you see an enemy who's 12-feet tall with a number of battle scars, then the chances are, he'll be difficult to defeat. The cities are gloriously constructed but they are also full of adventures and side quests. And although player's can't die, it will be beneficial to survive all encounters so that your character levels up via the intricate skill system.

Add to this the astounding weather effects, such as rain and snow, that can actually affect the flow of combat, then you have a recipe for an MMRPG that can reach out to a wide audience. Soon you will be able to get involved in the *Warhammer* world, only you don't need to wear a black t-shirt to join in.













The term dynamic weather is much abused in this industry, but Climax is hoping to deliver a system that will drastically affect the nature of combat. Expect snowflakes, rain and, if you're lucky, a touch of sleet



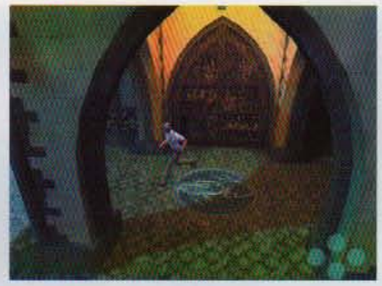
The creatures in *Warhammer Online* are well animated and communicate a real sense of scale and majesty. As in most MMRPGs it's probably best to club together with a few mates to defeat the larger monsters

Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC, GBA
Publisher: TBC
Developer: Revolution
Origin: UK
Release: September 2003 (TBC)
Previously in E11

The graphic adventure must change or die, but will it be evolution or Revolution? Probably both







As the ECTS *Broken Sword III* press conference draws to a close, Revolution's director **Charles Cecil** places his hands on the lectern and readies himself for questions from the 200-strong congregation. A nervous European journalist in the front row coughs, and raises his hand. "Hello… I was just wondering… can you tell us what happens between George and Nico?" There is no small amount of desperation in his voice. He has clearly been waiting some time to find out. "Well, that's the million-dollar question, isn't it?" Cecil grins but, wisely, it's not one he's prepared to answer. Nervous tilts his head down in disappointment. He will have to wait a little longer to find out how the trilogy concludes.

Revolution is a storyteller. It understands emotional call and response, when to speak and when silence says more. At the start of the presentation, Cecil smiles and recalls how he's often asked about the future of the graphic adventure. He taps a button, calling the first page of his presentation onto the projector screen: "The Graphic Adventure Is Dead." There is an audible gasp of alarm among the *Broken Sword* devotees, but this is a pantomime, and they are just playing their part. Secretly, they know the series is in good hands.

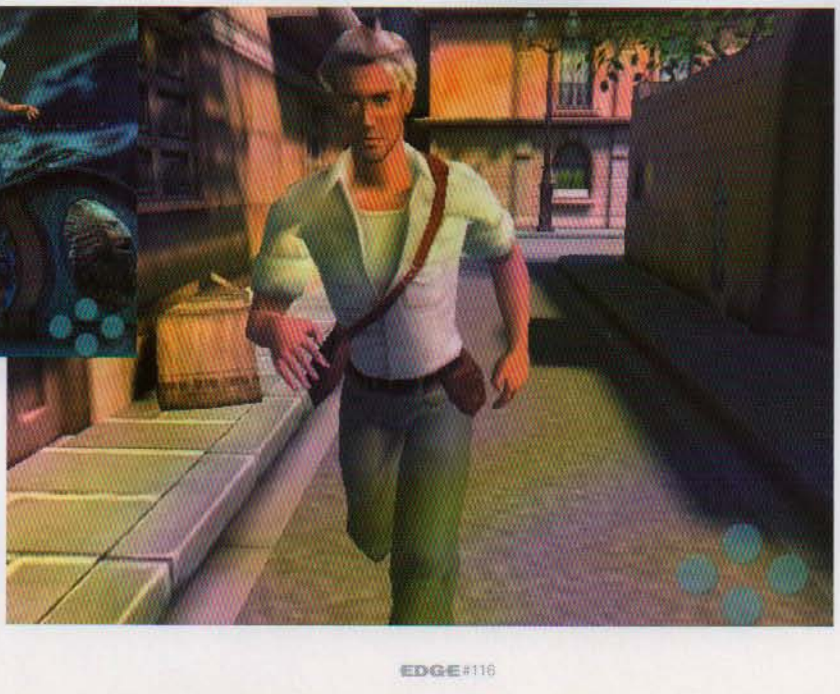


The graphic adventure isn't really dead, of course – it's just going next generation, which means a console-styled interface offering direction control over the lead character. That slight shift in emphasis comes with a new interface, led by the button icon map in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. As the player character approaches a key object the icons change, allowing the player to interact appropriately with a single button press. A ladder would cause one of the buttons to become 'climb', while a smaller object on the floor would see one button mapped to 'pick up', one to 'examine' and so on.

This transfers through to the action events, previously painted as *Shenmue*-style QTEs but actually more organic. The emphasis isn't so much on rhythm-action reaction as quick thinking and appropriate response. As the icon map changes during fights or time-critical escape sequences, so the player's options change. It requires thinking on one's feet, an experience perhaps slightly alien to many used to sedate graphic adventure experiences, but one that **Edge** expects Revolution to handle with care. This is, after all, its story.

"One more question," declares the journo-taming PR ringmaster. Nervous jumps in, coughs, ums, ahs, elucidates: "Will we be seeing any other characters from the earlier games?" he asks, tentatively. "Yes…" replies Cecil, knowing Nervous won't let the vagueness rest. Nervous doesn't. "Can you tell us which ones?" he spasms. "I think some things are best left for the players to discover, don't you?" responds the storyteller. **Edge** agrees.





While action gaming skills may occasionally prove an advantage during *The Sleeping Dragon*, it's expected that the emphasis will be on speed of thought over reaction times



The icon map system is clearly visible in the screenshot above, the illuminated square button illustrating an option available to George

Devil May Cry 2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Spring 2003**

Previously in **E**112

Edge meets with this charming man at ECTS, and discovers Dante's not quite as rawk as the gothic stylings might imply

There is a certain pattern you learn to expect in interviews with Japanese developers. That pattern is this; you ask a question about anything other than the number of weapons in the game; the question is translated; the response comes; and the response is translated into a mostly non-committal answer about the number of weapons in the game. It comes as little surprise when **Edge**'s round-table meeting with *Devil May Cry 2* director **Tsuyoshi Tanaka** starts heading in that direction; Tanaka-san is a stocky figure with spiky hair and a spikier attitude, prone to responding to questions with world-weary smiles and stock responses.

It's not just a Dante-style, too-cool act, though; he's genuinely a little bored, because, as he delights in telling the assembled interviewers, he used to be a games journalist and he knows exactly what everyone's going to ask. Hence all the things he expects to answer – roughly equivalent to the things he's prepared to give away – are neatly packaged in his answer to the first question. Unsurprisingly, his translator has practically learned the response by heart: what are the main differences between *Devil May Cry* and *Devil May Cry 2*?

"Well, it is a sequel, so we wanted to make it twice as good. Twice as good in every sense. So we have twice the resolution, double the size and two characters, Dante and another. And we are giving Dante twice as many moves, too – he can now run on walls and shoot in different directions with each gun." There is a nod, and that concludes the bulk of the new information that will be offered by Tanaka-san, and the important stuff. *Devil May Cry 2* is just more, more shooting, more gothic, more of a spectacle. Did he mention the shooting yet?

As for the other character, the group is told this much: her name is Lucia, she's a devil hunter like Dante, she uses twin blades for close combat, and playing as her changes certain routes in the adventure. And if that's not enough incentive for replay, *Devil May Cry 2* also features costumes to unlock for both characters.

Given Tanaka-san's penchant for Manchester indie – The Smiths, The Stone Roses and Oasis, the one thing he loses his nonchalance over – **Edge** has high hopes for a hooded top/beanie look for Lucia and a receding quiff for Dante. Hey, he's quite the Handsome Devil.

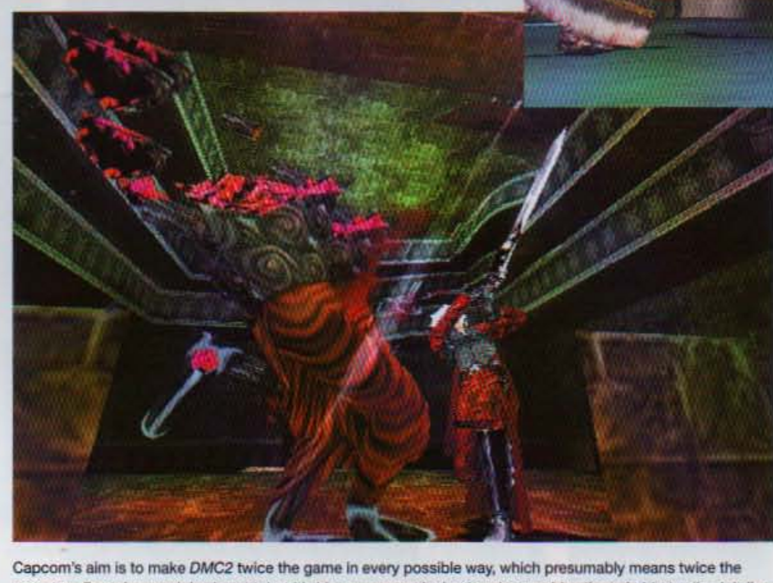


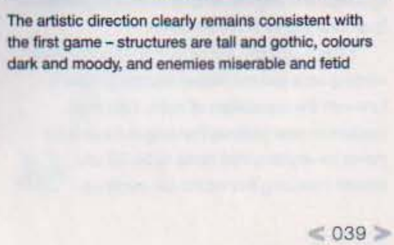












The artistic direction clearly remains consistent with the first game – structures are tall and gothic, colours dark and moody, and enemies miserable and fetid

Capcom's aim is to make *DMC2* twice the game in every possible way, which presumably means twice the gore, too. Dante's swordplay is neat, but it's his new comrade, Lucia, who provides the twin blade slice 'n' dice

Capcom Fighting All Stars



Format: Arcad
Publisher: Capcor
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Winte

Raging against the dying of the light, Capcom provides one last curtain call to its arcade career with a surprise Street Fighter conclusion





It seems Capcom just can't say goodbye. Having shocked the videogame world with its withdrawal from the arcade market, the company is now promising one last roll of the die – and appropriately, it'll be in the *Street Fighter* lineage. *Capcom Fighting All Stars* has the distinct flavour of an Arika-developed *Street Fighter EX* title due to the 3D modelling and the semi-realism of the backgrounds. However, whereas in the past the *EX* range provided a hybrid of 2D and 3D aesthetics, *All Stars* jumps in the latter camp, aiming to compete with 3D big boys such as *Tekken 4*. Characters show detailed styling and fluid animation, and there are rumours they also sidestep to avoid incoming moves, a la *Soul Calibur*.

The character list contains veterans such as Ryu, Chun-Li, Hiryu, Haggar, Nash and Akira, as well as newcomers DD, Ingrid and Luke. Little is clear yet about the fighting system: there's a three-stage specials gauge, a multicolour life gauge, and a smaller gauge, possibly a stun gauge under the life one. As you read this, a playable version should be at the JAMMA show in Tokyo.

It's rather late in the day to be courting arcade dwellers through *Tekken*-like fare, but Capcom is no doubt thinking of the imminent console conversions. With *Tekken* itself running out of creative steam and *Virtua Fighter* scaring off the mainstream, it could be time, at last, for a *Street Fighter* rebirth.





It's a (final) party and all of Capcom's friends are invited. Well, some of them anyway. Play it down your local arcade or (eventually) at home

Raiden Fighters

Format: Xbo
Publisher: TB
Developer: New World Syster
Origin: Japa
Release: Winte

The Raiden series looked to be dead and gone, but an upstart Xbox developer has exhumed the licence for a new generation. Could Xbox be the perfect platform for such hardcore activities?

Raiden is back. The legendary vertical scroller made its arcade debut in 1990 and has since spawned a mighty canon of sequels and conversions, sending orangey bit-mapped blasts across dozens of formats. Sticking with this seeming relic almost killed off original developer Seibu Kaihatsu, but now newcomer New World System, with a staff of only 14, is attempting to get the series going again. It seems Xbox is the perfect platform for this kind of endeavour – its similarity to the PC making it accessible to teams of self-trained coders. If Microsoft has any sense it'll encourage this bedroom ethic. Xbox needs all the help it can get in Japan.

Veterans will recognise the title. *Raiden Fighters* is based on the ultra-traditional 1996 coin-op of the same name, giving the player a choice of five different craft in the usual futuristic, Earth versus alien, invasion scenario. Enemy flak comes in relentless waves which can be dispatched with missiles and lasers – hold the fire button down and it charges for a more powerful blast. There are also loads of power-ups to collect and you can employ four drone planes to fly around you for more fire power.

If this is all a little too retro, the team is already working on a second *Raiden* title that's more in tune with the capabilities of Xbox. With most magazines now routinely handing out sub-5/10 marks for anything that dares to be 2D you wonder how long this rebirth can continue.







Those meaty bit-mapped explosions (left) and regimented enemy attacks (above) reek of old skool vertical scrolling gameplay. Will *Raiden Fighters* find a modern audience?

Drihoo

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **HighwayStar**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November 28 (Japan)**

Archeological adventures have been curiously thin on the ground recently. Luckily Japanese developer HighwayStar has seen the possibilities of combining Resident Evil with Indiana Jones… via 'Time Team'





Fortunately the lead character's mining equipment, which consists of a hammer and drill, doubles as weaponry. Each crypt is filled with a variety of monsters from scorpions to mummies

Several games have toyed with the concept of digging for treasure, but usually in an abstract way; *Dig Dug*, *Boulderdash*, *Mr Driller* – *Tomb Raider* starred an archeologist **Edge** seems to recall, but she did more pouting and double pistol firing than actual digging. *Drihoo*, in comparison, is virtually an archeology sim. You play a treasure hunter named Dank who hears about a newly discovered ancient site filled with valuable objets d'art. Competing against rival antique enthusiasts, players must locate profitable sites and start digging, or more precisely drilling, controlling the force and direction of the drill with the analogue pad so as to ensure the tunnel doesn't collapse. Dank also has a hammer to aid in the archeological process and both tools double as weapons: these tombs are guarded by ghouls and zombies rather than ineffective curses. There's a constant threat of traps and earthquakes to contend with, too.

Treasures can be brought to the surface and exchanged for gold or new items of equipment. Apparently, it's also possible to hang out in the bar and drink beer to restore energy (**Edge** wonders whether this will affect Dank's ability to control his drill). The quirky gameplay concept, combined with those kiddie visuals (part anime, part 'Lost Cities of Gold'), suggests a likeable and innovative little adventure. Whether or not there's enough here to sustain a whole, full-priced game is another thing.





Drihoo's visuals have a bright, cartoon style, both in the external locations (top) and the claustrophobia-inducing mining stages (above)

Thousand Land

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **From Software**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Autumn (Japan)**

From Software digs up a post-Pikmin garden adventure, but will it regret the decision to plant it on the arid Xbox?







Initially, the Chibis' only method of moving is to roll around, but when one reaches a certain level of experience, its arms and legs grow, helping it get around the Geosrate more effectively. The new appendages allow the introduction of new skills such as climbing walls and swimming



Xbox is far from being a must-have machine in Japan, with sales failing to respond even to a vast drop in price. Which makes From Software a rare thing, a large Japanese publisher working hard on Microsoft's console. From Software's *Thousand Land* is an original title, and one that mixes realtime strategy and simulation. The player begins with an allotted piece of land, 'Geosrate'. In the centre of the land lies 'a tree of life', from which the player receives a limited number of Chibi units, tiny Pikmin-like resources which, according to **Edge**'s source "resemble nipples." The player is charged with raising them, shaping them, teaching them to care for the Geosrate and also to fight.

A simple interface allows the player to give orders to the Chibis, who gain experience in proportion to the amount they're used. As well as the unit management, the player can modify the shape of the ground, as well as constructing buildings and military installations. The ultimate aim is to construct a Geosrate with your adversary in mind, one that prepares for a conflict, while also helping increase the level of your Chibis.

Every military victory brings back points which can then be spent on more aggressive units which, ultimately, will allow your garden empire to expand into the territory of your opponent.

Shadowbane

Format: P
Publisher: Swing! Entertainmen
Developer: Wolfpack Studio
Origin: German
Release: Q

From tiny acorns grow huge and terrifying online nation states. But fear not, there will still be time to woo maidens in Wolfpack's MMRPG





Shadowbane offers the usual MMRPG mix of teamwork and friendship across time zones, but will it draw enough subscribers to survive?

It must be difficult for a developer to find an audience for a new MMRPG. With *EverQuest* and *Ultima: Online* pleasuring thousands of online gamers with virtual real estate, can there be any room for anyone else? *Shadowbane*, however, is a little bit different. Although you get to create traditional mythical characters (admittedly **Edge**'s Elvan-raised Minotaur was somewhat on the unusual side) the game is unique in that it mixes potent elements of RTS gaming into the fantasy setting.

The idea is to clan together with other players and build a guild from a tiny acorn seed. So far, so clichéd. But a large part of *Shadowbane*'s appeal is that guilds can build structures including cottages, houses, villas, citadels and fortifications, expanding these to form cities, so that they can protect themselves from other aggressive neighbouring nations. And once a powerful city state has been created you can expect social and political manoeuvring both within the community and from without. It's also anticipated that large-scale wars will break out should relations between two neighbouring factions break down.

Unfortunately, the *Shadowbane* world is still a little too sparse, both in terms of beta testers and structures, to give it either a thumbs up or a thumbs down at this stage. However, it's an ambitious project, and one that is well worth following.





The game's main selling point is that you can form strong communities and then begin building structures to protect the group from nasty neighbours. But if the RTS elements will balance and work is unknown at this stage

Warrior Kings: Battles

Format: PC
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Developer: Black Cactu
Origin: UK
Release: February 200

Black Cactus' popular Warrior Kings returns, but this time it's improved the hideous loading times that dogged the first title

Three-hour long multiplayer battles are not for everyone. But log on to an online game of Black Cactus' laudable *Warrior Kings* and you need to be sitting very comfortably. The skirmishes are of epic proportions and, clearly, not even diehard PC players can always spare the time. But for the sequel things should clip along at a much faster pace. The horrific loading times have been reduced and most battles should only take up the best part of a lunch hour.

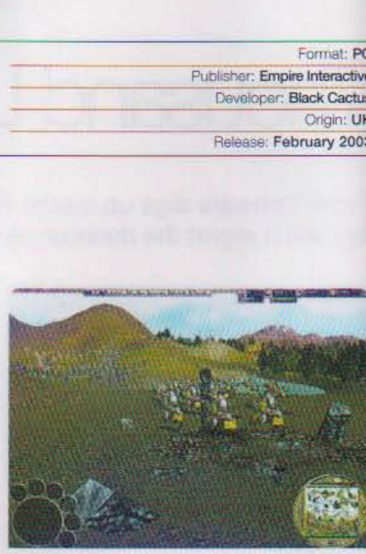
However, although these problems have been addressed the team has spent most of its efforts on overhauling the CPU AI for the singleplayer game. It boasts that the AI is so sophisticated that you'll soon forget that you are competing against a computer opponent. The new Skirmish mode introduces enemies with different levels of aggressive, defensive and stealth 'mentalities'. And depending on the outcome of individual encounters the AI variables alter, making enemies less predictable than they were in the first title.

The code that **Edge** has seen running is very appetising, and the ebb and flow of battle has been captured with some spirit. The addition of druids and high priestesses (which can transform trees into wood elementals and create a ghost army, respectively) should also ensure that there's plenty of variety. It's one for hardcore RTS fans, perhaps, but *Warrior Kings: Battles* is likely to be a sterling effort.





Warrior Kings: Battles is beautifully balanced with each unit having great strengths, but also great weaknesses. The singleplayer campaign is much improved and you can run rampant through territories or take a more measured approach





As in the first game judging the line of sight is important for success. Enemy troops remain invisible until they come into view to raise tension

Reign of Fire

Format: **Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment**
Developer: **Kuju Entertainment**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November**

Previously in **E**110

Not since 1666 has it been so hot in London. Expect fireballs and firefights in Kuju's entertaining take on the rather absurd film





The game doesn't deviate much from driving/flying around and shooting things and there's not a great deal of subtlety on offer. However, it can get very frantic and watching dragons collapsing under heavy gunfire is fun

Post-apocalyptic settings are hardly new to videogames, but one populated by dragons is certainly worth further investigation. Forget the histrionic film for a moment (while dragons sleeping dormant under the streets of London is far-fetched in a film, it's a perfectly logical premise to anyone who's experienced a *Final Fantasy* game) *Reign of Fire* has all the hallmarks of an entertaining videogame.

However, first impressions don't exactly get the pulse racing. Okay, we are transported to a war-torn futuristic Britain, but does everything really have to look so brown? And it's not just that the textures are different shades of faun, there's little sense of real depth or detail to the surrounding landscapes and structures. Perhaps when the game gets closer to London, things will improve. But thankfully, when the dragons attack, the frenzied action is enough to take your mind off the poor visuals.

Reign of Fire's main selling point is that you experience the unfolding tale from both sides of the conflict. There are approximately 20 missions in the game and half are from the perspective of a dragon attempting to protect its brethren from the human resistance fighters, though **Edge** has yet to get a hands-on playtest of this side of things. However, although the variety is welcome there's little evidence of real spark or innovation on show. It's all very competent but – wait for it – it's unlikely to set the world on fire.





The scanner in the top left-hand corner of the screen displays both friend and foe. Homing missiles can be used to destroy the large dragons

Breath of Fire V: Dragon Quarter

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer 2003**

Capcom revives its long-running RPG series with a visually impressive PS2 incarnation, boasting several key innovations along with the stylised 3D visuals





As is usual RPG etiquette, lead character Ryu (a *Breath of Fire* regular) must meet up with and recruit a variety of allies en route



These encounters look rather familiar, but Capcom has created a range of battle system innovations to enliven tired random conflicts



Since 1993, Capcom has been toying with the rules and regulations of the RPG genre through its immensely popular *Breath of Fire* franchise, doing crazy stuff like giving each object a weight, thereby restricting what a character can carry. The PlayStation2 instalment will be no exception to this rebellious lineage. Based on (or rather in) an Earth where the population has been forced underground by some seismic ecological disaster, the game centres around one young hero, Ryu. He decides to venture to the surface, and so sets in motion a typical journey of discovery.

It is here that rules begin to be broken. Before standard random battles, players will be able to employ the Positive Encounter and Tactics System to set traps and diversions for incoming enemies. The 'Survival' gameplay system – around which the whole structure of the game hinges – also offers the chance to back out of fights or to time attacks correctly rather than plough in, in a turn-based mêlée. Finally, Ability Points can be collected throughout the game in order to gain access to new more powerful combos and spells.

Critical opinion has recently been turning against the *Final Fantasy* series (at least in more sceptical quarters) for its predictably linear and CGI-driven gameplay. Now could be the time for Capcom's more progressive series to regain its position at the top of the RPG chain of being.

World Rally Championship Extreme

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Evolution Studios
Origin: UK
Release: November
Previously in E115

Play of latest preview code reveals an experience not that different from Evolution's first attempt. Then again, it's not that similar either





It's possible that switching to the Force Feedback wheel will transform the handling experience in the same positive manner as its predecessor

Edge is still wondering what exactly is extreme about this rally title. It would seem that if SCEE is chasing an exaggerated and instantly accessible rally experience then it's too late – *Shox* (see p97) already has that sector covered. Regardless, *WRC*'s obvious strength is its exclusive licence. It almost guarantees that any videogame playing member of the continually growing rally fanbase is likely to pick up the box with the familiar three letter logo over the competition.

And frankly, based on current code it's not likely to be a bad purchase. True, the handling does feel light and sensitive at first but things soon settle down (it's still too frantic for **Edge**'s taste but a delicate touch can reap the rewards). The visuals utilise a colour palette that lacks sparkle and oddly makes things look less realistic than last year's *WRC* title, and generally things seem dumbed down for the typically ill-perceived massmarket approach (let's not forget how long Codemaster's *TOCA* game – one of the most hardcore racing experiences around at the time – spent in the all formats top ten).

The above concerns aside, there's some great rallying to be had here. Various elements such as presentation and some of the in-car views are excellent and combine to provide an accomplished (and the only official) WRC game. Expect it to go up against *Colin McRae Rally 3* in next month's testscreens.





Stage length is reassuringly substantial although some of the pace notes tend to be read out too late and the game's menu system is not particularly intuitive – things Edge expects Evolution to correct before the title's release

Total Immersion Racing

Format: Xbox, PS2, PC
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Developer: Razorworks
Origin: UK
Release: Q4
Previously in E112

Drivers that hold grudges and a career that might end after one bad crash. But can Razorworks' racing effort do enough to stand out?

Total Immersion Racing? A title in serious danger of breaching the Advertising Standards code of practice if first impressions are anything to go by. Imagine AI with a long-term memory. That's what developer Razorworks is aiming to implement in order to distinguish this from every other driving game on the market. The idea is simple: if you shunt a rival off the track in one race he'll try to get revenge at a future date. However, current code shows little evidence of this. But that's probably due to the fact that the game is too easy in the early stages. Opponent's won't even get a chance to touch you, as you drive off easily into the distance.

Clearly much balancing has to be done before release, but the game is lacking in other departments, too. Visually, it ranges from bland to crude. Jaggies are so bad (on the Xbox version) that you'll think you're watching a two-year-old PS2 game. And while the handling is good, the sound effects, framerate and lack of scenery make the racing seem pedestrian. It's not terrible, but there's nothing to make it stand out from other more polished driving games.

Once more work has gone into refining the AI and game structure perhaps things will improve. The focus on building a career and moving from one team to another will add impetus to the on-track action. But in general, *Total Immersion Racing* needs a bit more than a wax and polish if it's to survive in a crowded genre.





Although Edge doesn't believe that a licence improves a game, it's hard to see *Total Immersion Racing* doing well at retail. Sure, it ticks all the right boxes, but it still lacks a bit of sparkle to stand out from the likes of *TOCA Race Driver*





Along with well known tracks such as Silverstone, Razorworks has created a number of its own. The sense of speed, however, is currently poor

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Metroid Prime

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios





Very nearly here (well, the US version at least), the latest shots of Retro's three-dimensional reworking of one of NCL's strongest franchises suggest even further aesthetic improvement

Sega Rally Championship

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega Rosso





A project to keep fans happy while the team looks for more time to develop *Sega Rally 3*, this original 3D interpretation promises plenty of content as well as the original music score

Maximum Chase

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Genki



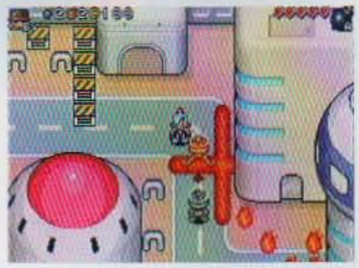


Edge wasn't that impressed when it first saw this at last year's Tokyo Game Show but recent code suggests an improved experience. A testscreen is expected to make it next month

Bomberman Jetters

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Hudson
Developer: In-house





Explore planets and their dungeons, select the right bomb for the right job and raise Charabombs (small helpful creatures). Battle game allows familiar fourplayer action (one cart)

Star Fox Adventures

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare



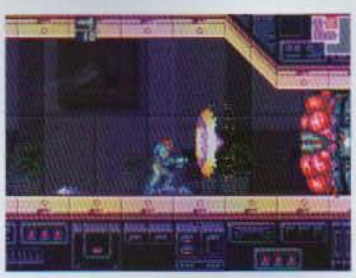


Rare's last outing on a Nintendo platform sadly failed to make it in time for this issue's review deadline. At E3 things looked mostly promising – hopefully there are further enhancements

Metroid Fusion

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house





It's been a long time in coming, but the true successor to *Super Metroid* should be with us before Christmas. Could it finally topple *Advance Wars* from the GBA top spot?

Batman: Dark Tomorrow

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Kemco
Developer: In-house





When a developer tells you there are hours of cut-scenes you have to worry. At least they're lovingly crafted and propel the plot superbly. As for the game itself? Currently it's a bit rough

Starsky & Hutch

Format: PS2, PC
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Developer: Minds Eye





There's no playable code as yet, but the thought of tearing around the streets of Bay City in the 'striped tomato' is mouthwatering. Of course, it could just turn out to be another terrible licence





Haven: Call of the King

Working from a shed in Nutsford, and better known for platforming-for-hire, Traveller's Tales is an unlikely breeding ground for one of the most ambitious platforming titles Edge has seen in a while

Anybody taking even a cursory glance around the recent PlayStation Experience will have found it difficult not to notice the forthcoming abundance of platforming titles. After a long, lean spell for the genre, with barely a handful of highlights such as *Jak and Daxter*, the current crop of consoles is finally bracing itself for a new wave. *Ratchet & Clank*, *Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus* and, of course *Super Mario Sunshine* on GameCube; these represent just the tip of a particularly large iceberg. Also at the tip of that iceberg, if Nutsford-based Traveller's Tales gets its way, will be *Haven: Call of the King*.

Having spent nearly three years developing the title, the company has got some massively ambitious plans for *Haven*. Which is, of course, something that every developer is only too happy to tell **Edge** about their latest work. But sitting down with company founder, **Jon Burton** and producer Arthur Parsons at the company's headquarters, the scale of that ambition rapidly becomes evident. Not that it's clear from the game's plot which, though it might not win any awards for originality, does provide an overarching structure upon which to hang a game that encompasses seven entire planets, and a comprehensive range of play styles.

"You play the part of a guy called Haven," explains Burton. "His race was enslaved by the evil bad guy, Vetch, who took over the hero's home planet a long time ago and infected them all with a virus. So if they didn't get a regular antidote off



***Haven* mixes several gameplay styles together to produce what might be the most eclectic game ever. How successful each is, remains to be seen**





- Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
- Publisher: **Midway**
- Developer: **Traveller's Tales**
- Release: **November 29 (PS2), Q1 2003**
- Origin: **UK**













After some platforming action the player is thrust into outer space for some on-rails shooting. The flow between each section is handled well and there's little time to get jaded

him they'd die. After they were effectively enslaved they were moved to another planet a couple of centuries ago. At the start of the game, Haven has been having dreams in which a bird appears flying towards a golden tower. But whenever he wakes up he doesn't understand the meaning of these dreams. So the game starts with him trying to build the bird that he's seen in his dreams." And then rapidly segues into collapsing mine shafts and a quick, village-exploration tutorial.

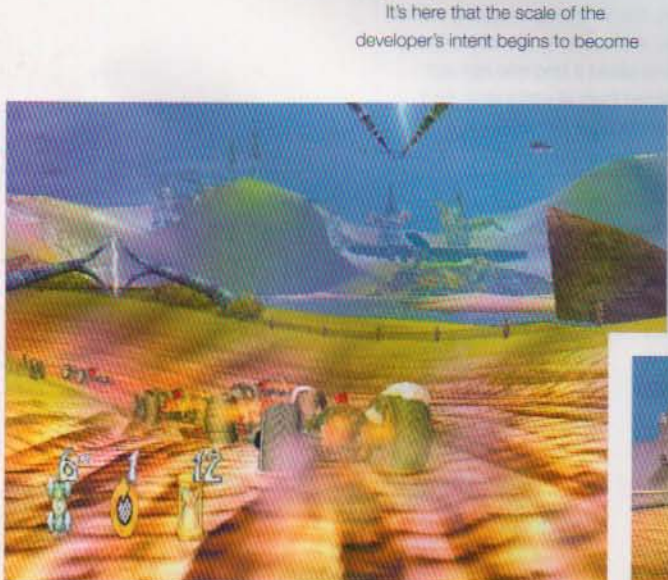
It's here that the scale of the developer's intent begins to become apparent, as the team treats **Edge** to a play through of the game's first planet – recounted here in full in a bid to impart the bold reach of the title. The first level, set in a lava-filled mine, features the kind of conventional platforming-style gameplay that will be familiar to anyone who's experienced the likes of *Jak and Daxter*. Avoid enemies and lava, collect the pick-ups and navigate your way to safety. There are a few nice additions though, for example the minigame operated machinery, and set-pieces such as a searchlight area and the first boss encounter are well enacted.

"I really think that melding genres is the way forward for games. Why not get all of them together in one title, and get it seamless, with a good story behind it?"

Once outside, the action moves swiftly on to a monorail section. Against the backdrop of a fractally generated landscape that disappears into an appropriately curved horizon, players are thrown into an on-rails shoot 'em up, featuring waves of attackers and finally a substantial boss. And then it's on to another platforming section in a lakeside town before hopping into a powerboat to reach an island in the middle of the lake. Players then proceed through a *Monkey Ball*-style atlasphere sequence, before competing in some kart racing and a sort of vehicle-based arena deathmatch, each punctuated by platforming sections.

Planes, trains and ferries

But it doesn't end there. The action moves on to another rail-based shooter, this time on a ferry, which builds up to a veritable behemoth of a boss. Then it's on to a hub section, demonstrated at E3, which manages to feature a *Pilotwings*-style hang-glider section, a gladiator arena, an aeroplane and an Indiana Jones themed 'chamber of doom' complete with set-piece puzzles. In this latter section, watching swarms of insects react to



And then it's over to the kart racing... don't expect the sophistication and addictive qualities of *Super Mario Kart*, but driving sections are well balanced and enjoyable













and retreat from Haven's torch is particularly striking.

And that's just the first planet. The game continues with interspace combat and further adventures across six more. Although it's broadly linear in structure there are plenty of bonus areas and diversionary sections. And as should be clear, it combines a mind boggling amount of different types of play. "What we're trying to do with the game that's a bit different," explains Burton, "is that though we're trying to do every section of gameplay as well as anyone else has done it, we're trying to tie them all together. I really think that melding genres is the way forward for games. Why not get all of them together in one title, and get it seamless, with a good story behind it?"

Common sense

Common sense, surely? After all, what makes an outfit more usually associated with work for hire think that it's capable of delivering such an elaborately wrought combination of genres? Well Traveller's Tales has quietly sold 15 million games in its 14-year existence, which, as Burton modestly puts it, is actually "quite good for a shed in Nutsford." As he also argues, platform games aren't the easiest to develop. "There are set rules, and if you don't know them, you can't do it."

Having worked on titles such as *Mickey Mania*, *Toy Story*, *Sonic 3D*, *SonicR* and, most recently, *Crash Bandicoot: Wrath of Cortex*, it can hardly be argued that the company doesn't know them – though there were one or two areas which needed to be brushed up. "We only added double jump really recently. Because I come from the old school of platformers, we originally had it so that pressing jump twice would make your character slam into the ground. It was one of those silly things that could easily have made it into the final game, but nowadays with *Jak and Daxter* coming along with the double jump as default, people at E3 were getting exactly the opposite results to what they were expecting when they pressed jump twice."

Trifling matters aside, one of the ways in which the title already impresses is in the range and interrelationships between the various game mechanics. Although the moves and mechanics are ostensibly simple, as Burton reels through them it becomes clear that out of such simple building blocks, quite a complex system emerges. There are several basic collectibles in the game. The most essential is antidote, without which your character will expire. But in addition to this, there are cogs that can be used to power up machinery and unlock doors. And then there are two types of feathers; pick up a set amount (usually about five per level) and Haven's mechanical bird will come and lend assistance – solving a puzzle, or opening up a bonus area, for example.

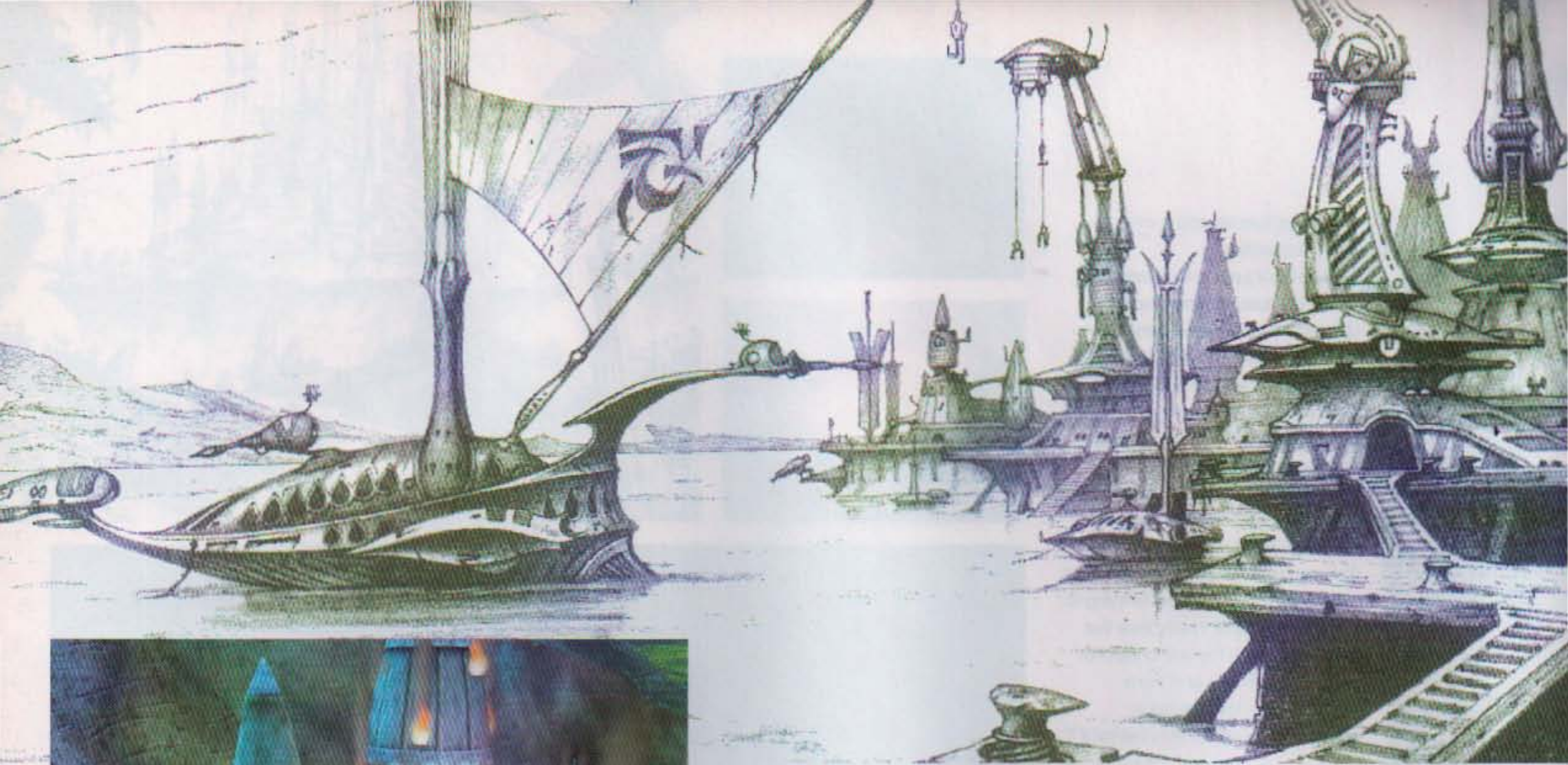
Then there's Haven's metal yo-yo, which can be used both as a weapon and to suspend from and slide down metallic surfaces. Or it can be used in conjunction with his shield to power up special attacks. This shield can also be used in a variety of ways, all requiring shield energy, which gradually gets depleted as the shield is used. It can, for example, be used to power up electrical conductors that are scattered throughout levels, powering up machinery, or activating power-ups.

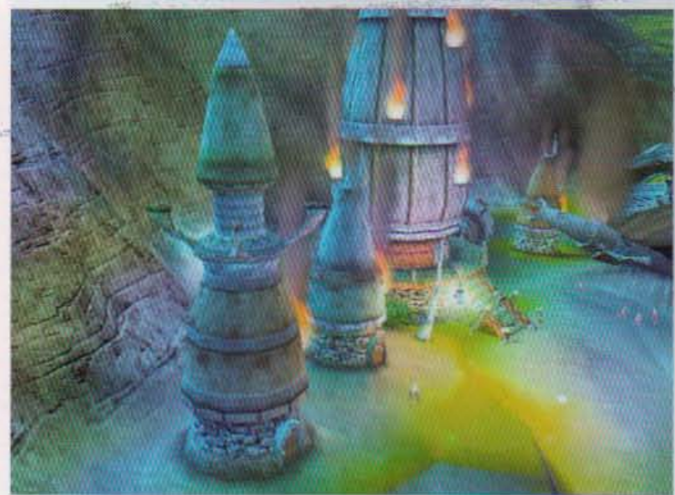


Players will have to hone all their gaming skills to get through *Haven*. The title's hang-gliding stages call on subtle adjustments and more considered timing. But will the masses cope with the variety?



***Haven* began life as a floppy-eared Traveller's Tales mascot, but focus testing put paid to that. Big ears, it turns out, are old hat. The cut-scenes are short and fun**





Picking up special feathers will entice Haven's mechanical bird to provide assistance. Although the game is mostly linear, expect one or two surprises and bonus areas





Infinite lives should ensure that *Haven* never becomes irritating. Among the pick-ups crucial to success are goblets of antidote without which your character will expire. The yo-yo weapon is a neat touch

In one level, for example, an electrical conductor initiates a refractive shield, allowing Haven to negotiate a corridor bristling with lasers. Significantly though, this isn't the only way to reach your destination; a variety of weapon pick-ups and other power-ups, such as a temporary laser, allow players to navigate platforming sections in a variety of ways.

Adding to the possibilities are various pots which are scattered across *Haven*'s landscapes. Some offer onscreen advice, for example, while other, 'proximity pots' act like mines. And then there are the puzzle pots; invisible pots that appear when Haven jumps into a trigger pot. Or, adding to the potential replay value of the title, pots that contain suitably cute fire dragons. "If you use your shield to protect yourself, you can release these dragons and they'll follow you round if you're using your shield. If the dragon goes near any other fire pot he'll go and hide in it, but there are some pots that can only be smashed by a fire dragon. And there might be other rewards for getting him to follow you to the end of the level," says Burton.

Play it by ear

The only real disappointment about the game at this stage is that, next to the brightly coloured charms of *Ratchet & Clank*, or the cel-shaded charisma of *Sly Cooper*, *Haven* might actually appear slightly bland. Designed by acclaimed fantasy artist, Rodney Matthews, the character actually started life as the Traveller's Tales floppy-eared mascot until focus testing discovered that gamers don't like floppy ears. Nevertheless, the rich variety of gameplay should offset any aesthetic disappointments. Although there's a danger here too, that the game may even combine too many genres for the massmarket. Not every mainstream consumer will be able to get to grips with the reflexes needed for a shoot 'em up, or the dexterity required for vehicle-based deathmatches, after all.

But this is an issue that Burton's already considered. One possible solution is a difficulty level that is adjusted according to how frequently players die (following the precedent set by *Jak and Daxter*, players are granted infinite lives). But in the long-term, it's an issue that he hopes to address in potential sequels. "The sequel will be similar but bigger, because hopefully we won't have to lead players by the hand. But the game after that, I really want it to be so that you can pick the game you want to play – so that you can just play the platform sections initially, for example, and by doing that you might be able to earn currency that will improve your performance in other sections of the game. That would be around PlayStation3 time though."

Bold words given that the first instalment has yet to be completed. But having sat down fairly extensively with *Haven: Call of the King*, and given the technical polish of earlier Traveller's Tales titles, **Edge** is confident that such boldness is justified. Even in the face of stiff competition from other high-profile platform titles.

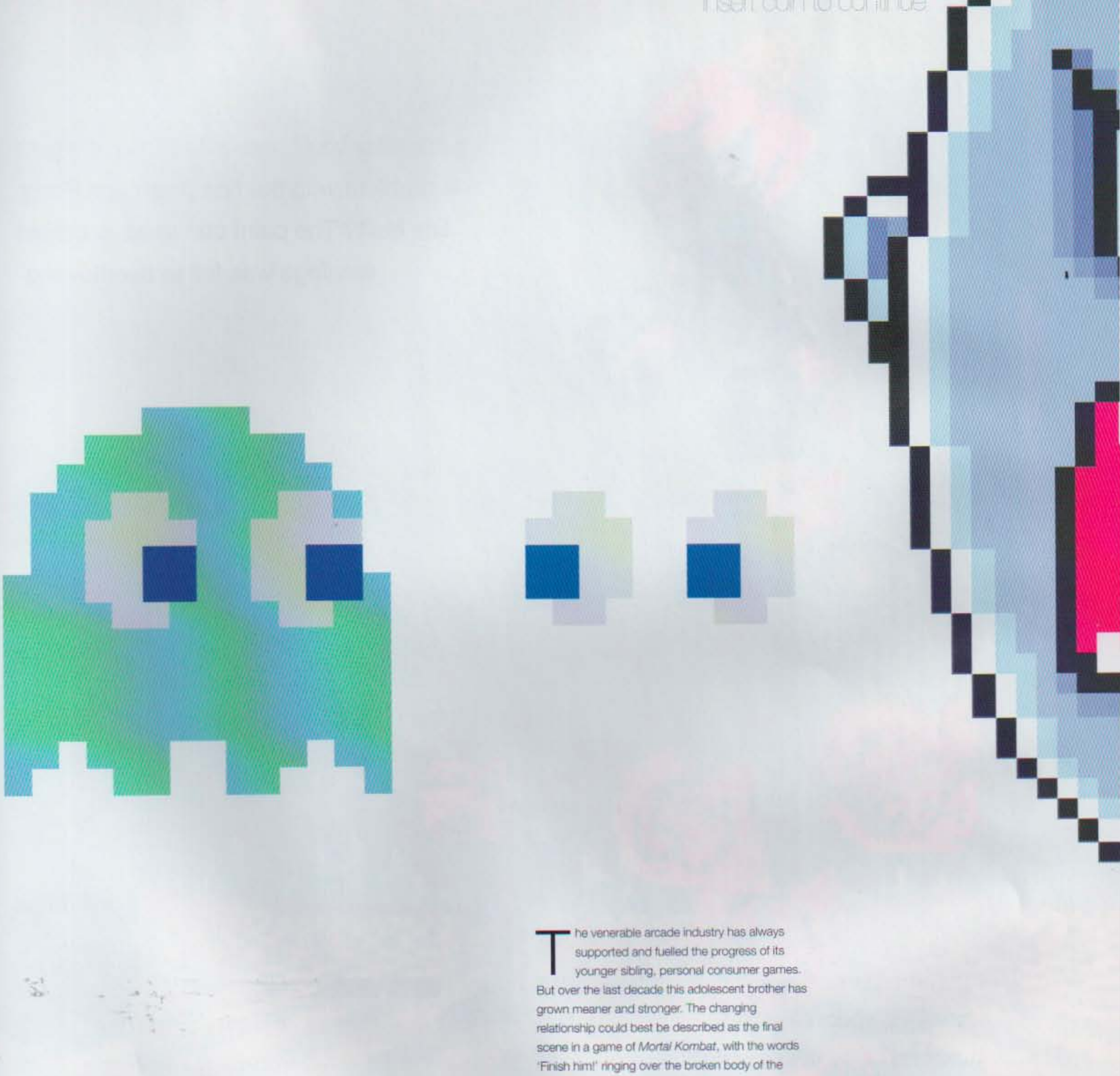


If Haven collects enough cogs he can power up machinery to open doors or trigger cut-scenes. Traveller's Tales is already thinking about sequels

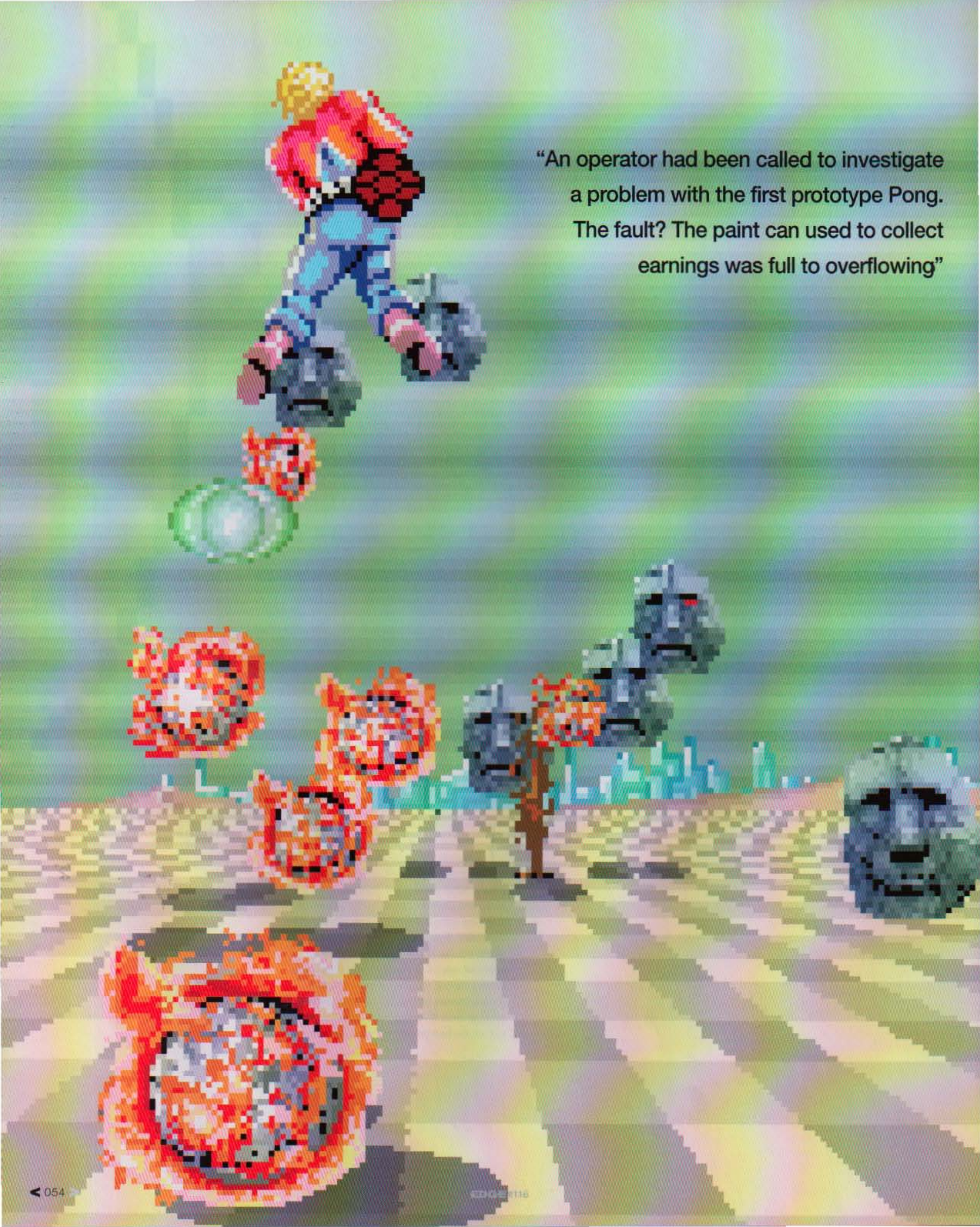
Insert coin to continue



Once the fastest-growing sector of US and Japanese commerce, video amusements have now become something of a joke – a big-risk proposition with little chance of success. How did the arcade industry fall from its heady days of Pac-Man and Street Fighter II? Edge charts coin-op gaming's history in order to discover what went wrong



The venerable arcade industry has always supported and fuelled the progress of its younger sibling, personal consumer games. But over the last decade this adolescent brother has grown meaner and stronger. The changing relationship could best be described as the final scene in a game of *Mortal Kombat*, with the words 'Finish him!' ringing over the broken body of the arcade industry. And to be even more brutal, what's left over? A few point-and-shoot gambling devices, the odd freak from Korea, and the occasional video golf machine hiding at the back of bars and pubs. So, where did it all go wrong? To find out, the best place to start is, well, at the start.



"An operator had been called to investigate a problem with the first prototype Pong. The fault? The paint can used to collect earnings was full to overflowing"

The origin of the species

When describing the arcade industry, the analogy of walking down a seaside pier seems cruelly appropriate. A popular venue of entertainment in a bygone year now left in a dilapidated state from past glories.

Entering the pier, 'video amusements' were once seen as a parasitic market feeding on the back of the then-established and profitable coin-operated amusement sector. The coin-op industry began to flourish in the '30s, with the explosion in mechanical entertainment systems personified by pinball tables (developed from the original Baffle Ball games) and mechanical carnival cabinets. These cabinets included many of the game concepts that would inspire a generation of video amusements.

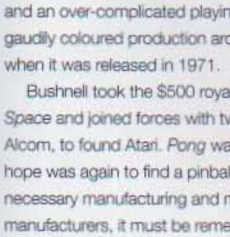
By the end of the '60s solid-state circuitry and video monitors reached a price where they could be considered for application beyond the laboratory. One of the larger American mid-west pinball manufactures, Nutting & Associates, invested in one of its technician's dreams to develop a coin-operated system that utilised this technology.

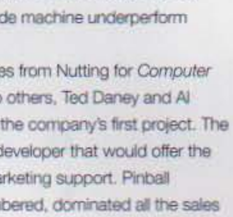
Nolan Bushnell entered the scene. Investment was placed into his project and would later be called *Computer Space*, a game that would borrow heavily from *Spacewar*, a title Bushnell had seen on the University of Utah's DEC PDP-11. However, a mixture of temperamental hardware, an expensive build price and an over-complicated playing environment made this first gaudily coloured production arcade machine underperform when it was released in 1971.

Bushnell took the $500 royalties from Nutting for *Computer Space* and joined forces with two others, Ted Daney and Al Alcorn, to found Atari. *Pong* was the company's first project. The hope was again to find a pinball developer that would offer the necessary manufacturing and marketing support. Pinball manufacturers, it must be remembered, dominated all the sales and distribution avenues available back in the early '70s.

Indeed, it was in the middle of a meeting with a prominent American pinball developer, Bally Midway, that Bushnell received a momentous telephone call from across the States in California. It concerned the first prototype machine that had been installed in Andy Capp's Tavern. The operator had previously called to complain about the unit breaking down, and Alcorn had visited the site in order to examine the problem. The fault? The recycled paint can that had been used to collect the earnings dropped into the machine was full to overflowing; the coin mechanism was literally jammed.

Negotiations with Bally Midway ended there and then. Bushnell immediately realised that Atari might be able to go it alone and *Pong* went on to do something very special: it broke the stranglehold the pinball manufacturers had on the





Before the silicon revolution, mechanical games provided entertainment in fairgrounds and bars (left). *Computer Space* was the first video arcade machine, but it took *Pong* to bring the form to the masses (right)



Radar Scope



Star Rider



Spy Hunter II

Games that broke arcade gaming's back

1971

Computer Space

The game that nearly caused videogaming to be stillborn. The unique manufacture and complicated controls proved that Nutting would be left with a large supply of unsold stock (which are now worth their substantial weight in gold to the retroheads).

1981

Radar Scope

The quirky vertical shooter would prove a big failure in the US for Nintendo, with a warehouse full of unsold titles, but from failure came incredible success when a game was developed to salvage the failed hardware, and so *Donkey Kong* was born.

1983

Star Rider

Midway's LaserDisc bike racing game that would play its part in starting the 'crash'. In 1985 Sega would release a similar presentation with its own 'ride-on' cabinet, *Hang-On*, a better game in a better package that effectively pulled the arcade sector out of the doldrums.

1987

Spy Hunter II

Midway again starts to shoot itself in the foot, regurgitating poor games and hiding behind past glories. This twoplayer twin-screen reworking of the original fell woefully flat, bearing a disturbing resemblance to another Midway failure from the previous year, *Max RPM*.

1997

Round Trip RV

SNK's first (and last) 3D driving game on its abortive Hyper Neo-Geo 64 3D tech, the project would squander the last of the company's R&D funds and would begin the collapse of the amusement operation some four years later.

1995

Indy 500

Sega's big hope for the invigoration of a tail end in big 3DGC games from the company, the world of IndyCar (attempting to interest the US players) proved weak, and left hundreds of unsold cabinets littering Sega's warehouses.

1999

Road Rash

The penultimate arcade game from Atari, and a very poor motorbike racing game that would cement the closure of the Atari R&D team. Not even the following launch of *Rush 2049* could save the operation.

2000

Arctic Thunder

The very last amusement game released by Midway, the game held the fate of the whole R&D and manufacturing operation when released. The failure of the game to even scratch the surface of success caused the closure of the entire operation (though it's claimed that Midway already intended to pull out).

coin-op market. Midway would still go on to acquire the *Pong* property, but only after Atari had made milked the format and sold 3,000 units. Indeed, *Pong* had quickly lost its momentum. Of the 10,000 units manufactured the majority were copies – many made by Midway under the name *Winner*. Years later the breakaway Midway operation would go on to acquire Atari itself – but let's not jump too far ahead.

Ironically, *Pong* had been a low-priority programming opportunity for Al Alcorn. Bushnell used the game as an experiment to test Atari's cabinet hardware, and though he often shirks the subject, he had seen a *Pong*-type game elsewhere. Ralph Baer had developed the first consumer videogame system with *Tennis for Two* back in 1972. The success of *Pong*, from the original concept by Baer, would later haunt Bushnell, and eventually embroiled him in an out-of-court legal settlement over royalties.

Bushnell has been a great spokesperson for the arcade industry, but he's also been accused of mythologising Atari's past. Such claims have seen a rethinking his 'father of videogames' tag. The 'stepfather' might be more accurate. 'Bushnell 1A: Dissection of a Video Game Industry Icon', a book currently in development, hopes to peel back the myth from the reality of Atari and its founder's role in the establishment of the coin-operated sector.

"If Higinbotham is the 'Columbus' (having created the first videogame in 1958 on an oscilloscope), and Baer is the 'Edison' (who, along with Higinbotham, tinkered with and perfected the Tennis for Two *game, thus evolving into the Odyssey), then Bushnell is the 'PT Barnum'. I believe that had it not been for Bushnell's flamboyance and his evangelical 'Pied Piper' persona (which continues to be the lore that follows him, as demonstrated by his diehard followers and pedestal-worshipping Atari fans), the videogame might not have ever caught on."*

Loni Reeder, author and former Atarian

In fact Bushnell would only be at the helm of Atari for seven years before being placed in a token position and finally unceremoniously fired by the then Warner Communications-owned corporate giant. By this time he had set in motion Atari's entrance into pinball, facility operation, consumer development, and the 'golden era' of arcade amusement.

With the ascendancy of Atari a slew of competitive video amusement manufacturers appeared. Arcade operators, initially concerned by the possibility of the theft from cabinets of their valuable screens, soon came around to the idea of video arcade machines – once revenues started rolling in.

Many technicians who worked for Atari would go on to establish the other younger arm of the business – the consumer computer industry. Apple's Steve Jobs would work with Steve Wozniak to create *BreakOut* (1976), which sold an estimated 16,000 units, and also initiate one of the bitterest feuds in the industry's early history, as the two supremos argued over credits for the game.

The impact of *BreakOut* also caused controversy in Japan. In Asia, these new video amusements were capturing the imagination of a number of companies that had banked heavily in the application of mechanical games within their home market (predominately mechanical cabinets and the way of life that is pachinko). The ability to license successful games allowed Japan to inspire a new generation of videogame designers.









From simple upright cabinets to the more elaborate excesses of the '90s (from top): *Choplifter*, *Gauntlet*, *Spy Hunter*, and a prototype of Sega's *Super Hang-On*

A reasonably sized Japanese operation with a previous history in fairground rides called Namco penned an agreement with Atari towards building the *BreakOut* machines under licence. The manufacturing run was so successful that organised crime groups soon took an interest. Video amusements encouraged the interest of this unsavoury business partly because of the large number of coins that were being generated with no receipts. Furthermore, video amusements were perceived to be one step away from gambling, and were often placed in seedy locations.

By 1977 the Japanese market was emerging as a force to be reckoned with and would eventually forge the future of the arcade sector. In the US, other manufacturers had joined Atari but the originality in game design appeared to flag by the end of the '70s when just about every variation of mechanical game had been converted into videogame format.

Several established companies in Japan were quick to tap into this new craze for video amusement, including mechanical machine operator and manufacture Taito Corporation, playing card and toy manufacture Nintendo and mechanical game service and sales operation Sega. But what came next was bigger even than *Pong*. Tokyo was about to experience a mania so intense that the manufacture of the ¥100 coin would have to be quadrupled.

"I believe that had it not been for Nolan Bushnell's flamboyance and his evangelical 'Pied Piper' persona, the videogame might not have ever caught on"

The Taitronic game, developed and programmed by Toshihiro Nishikado, changed the landscape of video amusements. On closer inspection Nishikado-san's game bore a striking resemblance to Taito's 1972 mechanical game *Space Monsters*, but that aside, the product created a dynasty. The *Space Invaders* franchise went on to generate $500m in revenues and even spawned a themed dance in the hip clubs of Tokyo.

Space Invaders proved that video amusements were a viable business proposition that could compete on an equal footing with mechanical coin-ops. However, it wasn't long before the first dangers of videogames emerged when people began complaining of '*Space Invaders* wrist'. Parents also complained that their children were turning to theft to fuel their new-found videogame addictions.

On the other side of the Pacific a prosperous business had begun for satellite manufacturers. American companies such as Midway looked to the east for originality and prosperous ideas. Taito's *Western Gun* (later renamed *Gun Fight*) pioneered the way for videogame licensing in 1975, and Midway reputedly made a mint out of this and subsequent deals.

Indeed, Midway secured the *Space Invaders* licence in 1980 and sold roughly 60,000 units out of the 750,000 units claimed to have been manufactured worldwide. As far as US gamers were concerned *Space Invaders* was wholly American and the Japanese lineage was only revealed much later.

Obviously, some companies either attempted to copy











Just a sprinkling of coin-op cabinet diversity from the late-'80s to well into the '90s (from top): *OutRun*, *Cruis'n USA*, *Kart Duel*, *Virtua Fighter*, and fourplayer *Indy 500*

successful games directly (the cupboards of certain respectable manufacturers is full of such skeletons of this kind, such as Midway's *Winner*), while others illegally imported machines from other countries, creating the infamous grey market that has blighted the amusement sector since its conception.

The first coin-op videogames were monochrome affairs, but beyond the use of coloured strips to simulate colour there was a need for more visually impressive representations. The inclusion of real colour would soon follow, along with the unique application of vector graphics. The beginning of the '80s marked the true golden age of video amusement and unit sales regularly reached into the thousands. The structure of the video amusement industry was now established, along with the various genres.

"It wasn't long before the first dangers of videogames emerged when people began complaining of 'Space Invaders wrist'"


From smoky den to glitzy multiplayer gaming zone: the arcade has clearly evolved, but it faces more change as the industry seeks a new identity

"To my mind, this was the golden age of the coin-op videogame industry. Not only did this period see the boom of the arcade business, but it was also the most innovative period in the industry. Many of the games designed during this period are still being copied in some form or another on platforms today."

Ed Rotberg, designer of *Battlezone* and *STUN Runner*

The popularity of driving, shoot 'em up and fighting games was established, and American developers created the various styles, though it became more common for Japanese developers to maximise the concept in the market. In 1983, however, the coin-op industry experienced a disastrous crash which saw the market decimated as operators – many having expanded too quickly – were forced to close their empty arcade centres. There was no single factor responsible for the crash but it's true to say that the games of the time simply stopped enthusing players. Many manufactures had to either rethink their development model or simply shut up shop.

Established firms such as Williams Bally Midway recorded vast losses, compounded by the fact that many had invested in new technology such as LaserDiscs (incorporated in titles such as Midway's *Star Rider*), and were left with vast inventories of unsold stock. North American revenue from videogames was estimated at $5m at the peak of 1981, but by 1983 it had plummeted to $3m. It was a market that rapidly lost business and consumer confidence.

"Williams suffered greatly in the crash. Floods of cheap videogames were dumped on the market, and the much heralded LaserDisc revolution of prerecorded track-switching games bombed. The company [Williams Midway] reverted back to the ancient '40s vintage California Ave factory in Chicago making pinball machines, and although a few video flops were produced, like Escort *and* Turkey Shoot*, nothing of significance was released until 1989's* NARC*. Basically, everyone thought that videogames were permanently dead, the hula-hoop of the '80s, a disco fever flameout scenario. Except Nintendo."*

Eugene Jarvis, creator of *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084*

It would not be until 1985 that the market regained momentum and began to become profitable again. But the scares of the crash left its marks, and the coin-op industry remained nervous for some time. So, out of the flames a new era began. An era that would be defined by conservative risk taking, standardisation and the three-minute-one-play philosophy.

After the crash

Following the crash, it became clear that a dedicated model of video coin-op development was too risky, and that a universal standard of hardware development was needed. Arcade operators were fed up with having to replace one machine by one manufacturer with a near-identical cabinet from another. The difficulty of quickly turning around poor-performing machines, and the headache of servicing similar cabinets, but with different wiring, needed addressing.

Companies had previously experimented with universal interchangeable systems. The Deco Video Cassette System launched in 1980 was the first time the Japanese sector (Data East in this case) had experimented with a standardised plug-in printed circuit board (PCB). But with the collapse of the market and growing clamour for the trade associations to provide a solution, the Japanese Amusement Machine Manufactures Association (JAMMA) brought together the leading manufactures and arrived at a solution. In Japan, the grand old men of video amusements (strong leaders of their corporations, acting like benevolent gods) created the JAMMA standard during 1985–6.

The technology concentrated on the key components of video amusement. The PCB comprised the processor, ROM chips and circuitry to enable the game, but in a revolutionary move used an edge connector that communicated to the corresponding components of the physical arcade cabinet via a wire loom. The joystick, buttons, audio, monitor, power and coin-operation systems were standardised in their connection to a simple 'swap-out' PCB, its structure open to all. Coin-op, not for the first time, borrowed from the consumer game sector that had been playing with cartridges using this hardware for years.

Technology has always fuelled the video amusement industry expansion. The JAMMA standard allowed a major revitalisation in the video amusement sector to the point that coin-op was back in business in 1985, but from an Asian perspective. At this point the old guard of video amusement attempted to control the industry so that the factors that led to the crash would never again rear their heads.

The video amusement sector had comprised a widely familiar cabinet, the 'vanilla' upright model. The JAMMA standard would allow games to be easily disseminated on this platform and so establish a firm core market for Japanese amusement. Obscure newcomers to video amusement prior to the crash were reinvigorated by the standard and now had a willing palette for their artistic outputs. Capsule Computers (later to be renamed Capcom), Data East, Shin Nihon Kikaku (later to be SNK), Toaplan, and Jaleco played their part in what might be termed the golden era for Japanese amusement.

Emerging from a collapsed market, Sega Enterprises created

a revision to the fixed arcade formula. Investment in development talent by the corporation had resulted in the hiring of an unknown programmer and producer in 1983. His name was Yu Suzuki and he would go on to develop two systems building on previous R&D software by his team. In 1985, along with the first 'ride-on' racing simulator (*Hang-On*), Suzuki-san's team created *Space Harrier*.

At this point there were usually only two flavours of amusement machine: the bog-standard upright cabinet and a larger 'deluxe' variant which boasted a higher manufacture quality and more powerful audio-visual capabilities. With *Space Harrier* Sega created a successful 3D shooting game incorporating an over-the-shoulder view, but more significantly introduced three unique flavours of video amusement system: the Sit-Down Type, the Upright Type, and, more influentially, the Rolling Type – a full-motion arcade system which blasted video amusement into an area bordering on fairground ride and theme park experience. Two years before Disneyland would install its 'Star Tours' motion simulation theatre attraction, *Space Harrier* offered an incredible vision of the possibilities beyond what had existed in video amusement.

Sega would focus development on 'Deluxe', 'Dedicated' and 'Uprights', breaking the mould, something compounded by the success of the 'Deluxe' motion version of *OutRun* in 1986. However, in offering the industry a high-end, expensive amusement alternative option, an unforeseen danger was placed at the heart of the amusement model. For when a vanilla upright cabinet failed, the price of lease or purchase could be weathered by the operator – from profits gained from other acquisitions. If, however, the operator had purchased one 'Deluxe' system at the expense of four or five uprights, the impact of failure (unpopularity) was magnified tenfold. Nevertheless, the development of fully immersive arcade cabinets would continue apace with such pinnacles of the craft as Sega's rotating *R-360* arcade system.

The move towards a more 'immersive' experience from video amusement was at odds with products from the more conventional amusement providers. In an industry that saw the near stillbirth of the *Street Fighter* dynasty (Capcom's disastrous first attempt to use punch pads to control the action in the first title in the series), inroads in the presentation of the various gaming genres were attempted. Video amusement had constantly toyed with new visualisation technology, and Midway and Atari would look into more realistic scene generation with the use of rotoscoping to incorporate actual video footage into the game scene, and build titles such as the infamous *Mortal Kombat*.

But it was the technology emanating from the simulation industry in its application of mission rehearsal systems (see 'Wargames'



House of games – a potted coin-op history

The beginning: 1970 to the mid-'80s

Once the home of pinball, bars and taverns were converted overnight into arcade halls once video gaming emerged as a strong moneyspinner. The dark, smoke-filled dens hummed with zombies glued to the latest videogame, the solitary illumination coming from monitors reflected on players' faces. These sites represented the low status that local government gave videogaming, its links to the more unsavoury side of entertainment seeing it treated as an illicit, drug-like gambling obsession rather than a popular recreation.

Some experimentation was attempted with videogames when fast food restaurants and certain retail stores attempted to place arcade machines in their locations, with differing levels of success. The machines found themselves in bars and clubs, though the main audience in the '80s was the teenager.

Pac-ing them in: the mid-'80's to late-'90s

Following the crash, the need to make videogaming more 'family friendly' moved to the fore and in America the development of the Pizza Time Theatre facility (envisaged by Nolan Bushnell) evolved into the successful Chuck E Cheese themed pizza and children's videogame site. Videogames pulled in the audiences while the operator of the venue tried to keep them there with snacks and gifts.

The industry split into two forms of operation. The independent operator represented those street sites that had installed the first videogames, and had managed to survive and expand. These sites purchased relative numbers of conventional cabinets, but also purchased one large 'Deluxe' machine to keep their facilities fresh. The second operators were the manufacturers themselves, with their own factory sites, hosting their own and competitors' machines, the biggest players being Sega, Taito, and Namco.

A brave new world: the late-'90s to 2000

The beginning of a new wave in video amusement experiences came with ATPs (amusement theme parks). Namco developed the Wonder Egg facility concept, a mixture of fun fair and theme park with deluxe video amusement systems. The more conventional upright cabinet was left out of the equation. Wonder Egg was followed by Taito's Cannonball City facility, Sega's JOYPOLIS and SNK's Neo-Geo World sites – multiple-level venues presenting the arcade as a full-scale attraction rather than simply a place to play videogames.

The international market became the target for the ATP concept, with a number of Sega World sites built in Australia, the UK, and downscaled for the US. The North American market was a hotbed of theme parks and large family entertainment centres was a tough nut to crack for manufacture-controlled sites. In order to smooth the transition, Sega teamed up with Universal Studios and DreamWorks LLC to create the GameWorks concept. At the same time the film industry and major entertainment developers tried their hand at creating ATP-style venues.

The latest 'crash' has brushed away only the most successful venues. The GameWorks concept of a bar, pizza, coffee and arcade 'urban factory' failed to enthral, but has hung on by its fingernails, attempting to reinvigorate its appeal with a new core audience. Companies such as Dave & Busters, Jillian's and XS Entertainment have become the new leaders and developers of the renamed urban entertainment centre (UEC), with food and drink as important to the new mature audience as the videogames themselves. However, the amusement market is not dead: $7bn is generated by amusement operations worldwide, and there is still a hunger for new games to feed the need. But, according to Namco American president **Kevin Hayes**, "Hardcore players have long gone and have been replaced by a more casual player. Games are now part of a broader mix of food drinks and entertainment, in places like Namco's XS Orlando, GameWorks and Dave & Busters, or children-orientated places."



in **E**114) that interested the new R&D divisions housed in the highly competitive heart of the amusement sector.

The financially unsuccessful but innovative *I, Robot* in 1984 applied the new technology of polygon generation that would rush the amusement sector into a converging course with consumer gaming. Atari developed the first true three-dimensional computer graphics (3DCG) car game *Hard Drivin'* in 1989. But at this point the company had been decimated by past financial difficulties and found itself in the position of having the Japanese developer that it had once supported acquiring a majority ownership of its stock in 1986. Namco was given a kickstart with this technology, developing its 'Polygonizer' hardware for *Winning Run*.



The graphics arms race begins

At the same time as Atari and Namco, Sega was investing heavily in polygon arcade graphics with its groundbreaking Model 1 hardware. It would eventually pave the way for the Virtua formula in 1992 (under the supervision of Yu Suzuki) and 3D graphics would influence all genres of video amusement after *Virtua Fighter* was released in 1993. But the expense of developing Model 1 – along with the inability to create seamless polygon representation available in military systems – forced the company into one of the many alliances that would fuel the technology arms race.

Sega would go on to create Model 2, with hardware support by simulator image generator manufacturer Martin Marietta. The brinkmanship that Model 2's appearance placed on Namco saw the development of the latter's System 22 – and other intermediate steps – that directly led Namco to compete with Sega. Of course, the rivalry eventually saw Namco trouncing Sega with the phenomenally successful *Ridge Racer*.

But were these developments responsible for the ultimate decline of the arcade industry? In the background, the establishment of a strong following for these 3DCG titles provided an opportunity for the repositioning of such games for consumer players. The maximising of home presence saw cost reductions in 3D technology in this field. The bridging of the power gap became a stark realisation with systems such as the Sega Titan (ST-V) hardware, a repackaged Sega Saturn console for amusement application.

The financial failure of Sega's console aspirations, with the Saturn console, was compounded by the Dreamcast's short life. But Sega's amusement division banked all on the possibility of what an arcade-derivative system based on this hardware would offer in cheap and affordable high-power arcade technology. The Naomi was born, a system that would support the latest version of the JAMMA standard (JVS). At the same time Namco decided to support Sony and its PlayStation console with an arcade-derivative system (the System 11), followed by the System 246, supporting the PlayStation2.

Other manufactures either had to sign agreements to license 3D hardware or enter into expensive R&D to develop their own architecture. At this point game prices rose to cover the spiralling costs of graphical technology and to many consumers the titles became less enjoyable. Just as in the crash of 1983, players abandoned machines in droves. Availability of new hardware to replace failed titles dwindled, while those that did sell carried an extremely high price tag.

By the end of the '90s the rise and fall of the arcade industry had run its dramatic course. Innovation was still apparent, in titles such as *Arctic Thunder* and *Police 24/7*, but at anything up to a £1 a go they were never likely to compete with the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 2* on PlayStation2 or *Halo* on Xbox.

And now? The video amusement sector is not waving, but drowning. At the crumbling end of the video amusement pier, there's some evidence of restoration work. But is the industry making the same mistakes? Manufacturers are pinning their



hopes on expensive simulators, virtual reality, and immersive technology. It's a new chapter, but will it be the story of a glorious revival, or another tale of woe?

"For me, the retrogaming movement is more than just nostalgia of misty eyed Gen X-ers. It's a reaction to the current graphical overkill, the simulation-obsessed gaming environment of the late '90s. In our quest for absolute graphical realism, we have forgotten the basics of gaming. Look at Virtua Fighter 3 *versus* Virtua Fighter 2. *Unless you are a proctologist, you can't find a dime's worth of difference in the gameplay. It is clear that the design team focused on the beautiful water effects, facial expressions, awesome backdrops, and 400-polygon, fully rendered loincloth animations."*

Eugene Jarvis

From home to the arcade

Atari's early experiment in the development of consumer amusement from its video amusement systems had seen home versions of sellers such as *Pong* and *BreakOut*. In establishing this market the first software companies were created and started to build games independently to support the growing home computer platforms, and then consoles.

The establishment of the consumer games industry would obviously father consideration of being able to return to arcade amusements with the gold generated within the console sector, thereby maximising possible profits (treating arcade games as merely another platform to support). The success of a consumer game placed into the arcades was seemingly confirmed when Sega released a *Choplifter* cabinet to great success.

This naive attitude would see many console software developers burn their wings, victims of the highly insular nature of the video amusement industry (compared to the open attitude of consumer gaming) and the difficulties of developing products that suit the unique requirements of the core arcade players. Predominantly fed on word of mouth and the revenue-generating opportunities of new releases, the arcade sector was a brutal taskmaster.

The most notorious attempt at consumer development turning to arcades would be that of Microprose. The flamboyant American consumer simulations company created a version of the six-million-selling home game *F-15 Strike Eagle* as a coin-op. In a vastly funded breakaway project, the company attempted to break into amusement. Following a poor reaction to its first game the company produced a second (*BOTSS: Battle of the Solar System*). A third game was stillborn (*Super Tank War*) and finally the operation was merged with Japanese manufacturer Jaleco in 1991 in the hope that Microprose's polygon graphics technology could help the Japanese company compete in a changing 3D industry.

Other companies stuck a toe into the swirling water of video amusement. With Nintendo's encouragement to port its games to the company's Vs. System and PlayChoice hardware (NES console games for coin operation), English developer Rare had prior arcade interests reignited. After three releases, beginning in 1986, the company created Rare Coin-It, producing a cabinet called *X The Ball* in 1992 and then *Battle Toads*.

Rare would be the first to strike arcade gold thanks to its close relationship with Nintendo. As the Japanese amusement giant exited video amusement to concentrate on its next console, Rare developed an arcade game. To gain arcade credibility, *Killer Instinct* claimed to use the new Nintendo 64 console hardware. Midway would release this and the Eugene Jarvis-developed *Cruis'n USA* title to great success.

"For me, the retrogaming movement is more than just nostalgia, it's a reaction to the current graphical overkill, the simulation-obsessed gaming environment of the '90s"

"We created a proprietary texture-mapped 3D hardware system and used it to create the driving simulation games Cruis'n USA *and* Cruis'n World. *The texture mapping hardware system, known as the V-unit, was purchased by Nintendo for use in the Nintendo 64 project."*

Eugene Jarvis

The possibility of cheap amusement console crossover was seen by SNK as a strong opportunity in the early '90s. The company developed a multiple game platform which embraced the cartridge system of the console sector, the universal game capability of the JAMMA standard, and the promise of memory card storage. In a revolutionary move the company established a model that would see gamers playing on the Neo-Geo MVS (Multiple Video System) in the arcades from a slew of high-quality 2D games from the master. At the end of the game the player would save his position, rent a home system from the arcade and then continue where they left off in the comfort of their own home. A vastly over-priced home system was needed to avoid consumer units overshadowing the arcade.

This Rolls Royce console system proved difficult to sell, amid a better reaction from the operator. Bolstered by strong MVS sales, SNK turned its main focus to the arcade component, dropping the memory card (a concept ahead of its time). The loyal fans of the MVS, however, would not be enough to save SNK, which fell by the wayside in 2000, its considerable assets later plundered.

In the depths of the second crash in video amusement, the consumer industry once again attempted to step into the breach and act as its saviour. Supported by a considerable marketing spend by Microsoft and Intel, the ArcadePC and Open Amusement Architecture (OAA) initiative was proffered. It was a sketchily thought out scheme that would see PC software developed for amusement application, attempting





Dave & Busters and GameWorks centres have injected some enthusiasm back into the sector. The combination of food, alcohol and video amusements have proved a popular draw in the US

to encourage prominent software developers to support their US-created standard.

The failure of the ArcadePC was eerily familiar to that of the system developed by Bell-Fruit Manufacturing in 1995, which launched with the execrable *Rise of the Robots*. Such promises of hidden gold within amusement also enticed Mastertronic with its abortive Arcadia System in 1988. Endeavours by Gremlin Graphics and Acclaim were similarly foiled, dashed by a close-knit and secretive coin-op industry, speaking a foreign language to that of consumer gaming.

"The industry has gone through an extensive purge and consolidation that we think was necessary for it to re-ratify itself and allow itself to move forward."

Al Stone, Sega of America

The remaining amusement developers were forced by their respective directors to turn most of their R&D effort not to amusement and their multiple-thousand unit sales but to the dependable million-selling console sector. The grand old men of Japanese amusement brushed aside for console-centric executive members; coin-ops a frivolous afterthought.

The American amusement sector dwindled to a sprinkling of manufactures. Midway, having acquired Atari Games, decided to withdraw from coin-op development altogether. And the end was nigh.

"Midway Games decided to exit the [coin-op] business in order to focus on the growing console industry. Midway found that the product development strategy necessary for success in both segments were no longer compatible. The coin-op market caters to a casual player... the consumer videogame industry increasingly caters to a player that demands great depth in game."

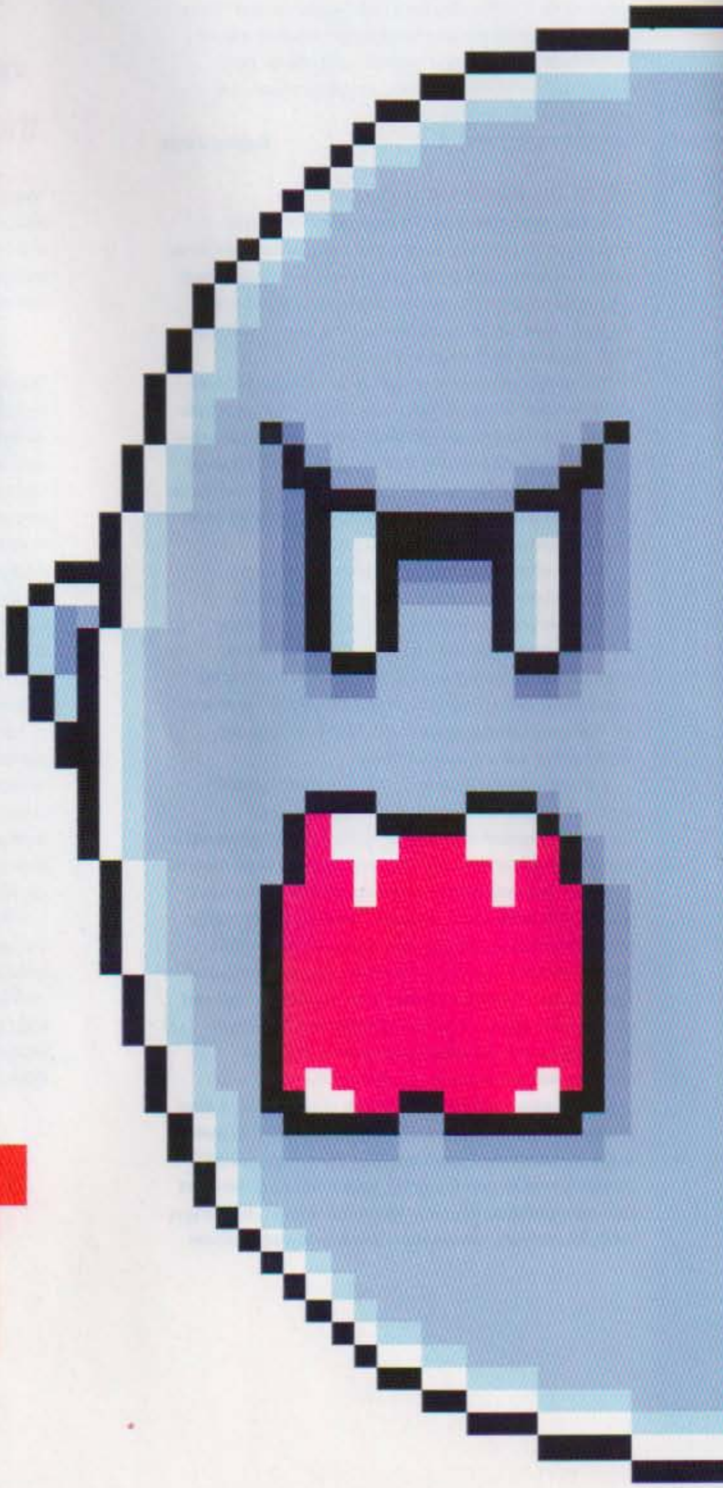
Mark Struth, influential exec in the closure of Midway Games







Sega World centres (left) initially proved successful but have since failed to keep Japanese consumers enthralled since home consoles hit the massmarket









Photography: Martin Thompson



extra life?

We were supposed to be connecting our frontal lobes to cyberspace, engaging in gratuitous virtual sex and generally living our wildest fantasies vicariously. But it's 2002 and all we have are dodgy video pool titles, redemption games and a raft of derivative lightgun cabinets. So, where next for the coin-op industry?

The AM (amusement machine) business is in a bad way. The Japanese manufacturers (which still dominate coin-op development) have shrunken considerably from the glory days of the early '90s, and those that remain have been forced into forming alliances in order to share technology and ensure prominence. The battle is now on to prove that video amusement can bounce back and play a legitimate part in the future of arcade gaming.

One of the most obvious indicators concerning the industry's health saw Sega and Namco, once embittered rivals, forming a close partnership, which brought Sega's independent studio Wow Entertainment (formerly AM#1) together with the *Pac-Man* creator on *Vampire Night*. Sega got to work on the sacred Namco System 246 architecture, while Namco benefited from the creativity of the team behind the legendary *The House of the Dead*.

But other covert plans have recently come to the fore. As the GameCube was being designed and manufactured, a secret coin-op plan was being put in place. As a replacement for the Dreamcast Naomi arcade hardware, the GameCube has been developed into an amusement variant. Under the TriForce name, both Sega and Namco have developed games for this new and flexible system.

"Sega amusement systems are among the most powerful and flexible systems on the market," claims Sega Enterprises of America chief **Al Stone**. "The graphic quality and the flexibility it offers our 1,000 R&D engineers are second to none."

Exciting times could be ahead. The second and third TriForce games will see AM versions of *Star Fox AC* (to be handled by Namco) and *F-Zero AC* (in the capable hands of Sega's Amusement Vision, previously AM#4) emerge, and the use of a dedicated tournament system for both of these games, linked to a storage card feature, will be an essential component for ultimate success. The use of networking, seen in the popular VF-Net system (applied with the recent *Virtual Fighter 4*) offers magnetic card use and an Internet scoring system to encourage tournaments. This has been a decisive factor in holding wavering players to play repeatedly.

The TriForce has received a low-key launch, with *Virtua Striker 3: Version 2002* being the first game to utilise the hardware in arcades, but the recent announcement to develop crossover TriForce products jointly with Namco and Sega will hopefully turn the GameCube memory card into a 'must have' arcade accessory for 2003.

"New business models are emerging all the time as the coin-op industry tries to find a model to replace the videogame model of the late '70s to the mid '90s," says **Kevin Hayes**, president of Namco America. "Hardcore players have long gone and have been replaced by a more casual player.



Members of Amusement Vision (formerly AM#4) contemplate the future of the arcade industry. But will *F-Zero AC* be enough to draw punters back in to arcade emporiums?

Games are evolving, locations are changing, and methods of payment/types of competition are changing. Tournament play is part of the new formula."

At the same time, having seen the System 246 at close quarters, and as chip stocks dry up for the Dreamcast-derivative Naomi 1 and 2, Sega has turned to another generation of arcade hardware. Entitled CHIHIRO, the Xbox-based arcade architecture has been incubating within the belly of Sega. Using it, influential game series such as *The House of the Dead* and network tournament games, the development of new 'mega' graphics environments are in the works.

Sega has at least two projects that use architecture nicknamed 'Naomi 3', which blows away the graphic performance of Naomi 2 and TriForce. Namco's plan, meanwhile, is simple: entice gamers back into their local arcades by making their heads spin. The venerable company has developed O.R.B.S (Over Reality Booster System), a fully enclosed gaming capsule which promises to power the next

did use Dreamcast hardware briefly and we will be using TriForce in the near future. It is no longer viable to use custom-designed hardware for coin-ops, and I don't see that changing. Companies such as Namco, that are heavily in the console market, will use console-derived hardware. Companies that are not [in the console market] are mainly using PC-based hardware."

Massmarket gaming

The need for the player to play more, rather than less, and feel satisfied about the game

"People are not interested in trying to be the best any more. That was only ever going to attract the real gamers in the first place. People want prizes"

OutRun are set to be updated, offering the most direct arcade-to-home route to date.

However, a spark of non-console-based development still burns in the hearts of Japanese manufactures. The lavish budgets that were once bestowed on AM R&D teams have evaporated, but major projects exist with the intention of separating out-of-home entertainment from console gaming. Crucially, along with large-



instalment in the *Star Blade* series. The use of the latest stereo sound technology, and an all-encompassing spherical screen to drop the player in the centre of the game, offers what is being termed a "better-than-home" experience.

"Namco has been using PS systems since the mid-'90s and is currently using PS2 hardware as the base for its system 246," explains Hayes. "As you know, we





Taito hopes to inspire the sector with games such as *Battle Gear 3*. The units will be site-linked and should allow players to record times on memory cards

experience has become a fundamental part of the new thinking in video amusement. The development of tournaments and networks is nothing new, but the latest technology is being applied to build a complete network that reaches far beyond consumer network gaming.

Imagine getting a call on your mobile phone when your score is beaten. How about receiving a challenge from a player in a local facility the same way? The appeal is obvious. However, the main objective of 'site linking' facilities is the ability for players in one site to play in realtime with players in another, distant facility. The latest game from Taito (*Battle Gear 3*) will boast not only a dedicated tournament scheme, but also the hope for 'site link' competition. If human nature is anything to go by, competitive spirit could boost the sector.

In the US and Europe the use of a tournament system has been used for cash prize applications. Incredible Technologies' phenomenally successful *Golden Tee Fore* is a golf game that comprises an ITNet tournament feature, with players across the US and Europe battling each other for considerable cash prizes. Last year Incredible Technologies paid out $3m in prizes, with an estimated 20,000 units hooked up to tournament networks. A new golf game has been developed based on EA Sports' *PGA Tour Golf*, ported for

amusement application by Global VR, which hopes to create its own mega-successful tournament system.

The popularity of the tournament game has seen arcade machines scaled down to a simple touchscreen terminal that resides in bars and clubs. These simplistic games offer very short burn entertainment, but their simplicity belies an addictive nature that has also seen their tournament schemes encourage high participation. In this guise, video amusement has reverted to a clever network prize system.

"The future for the traditional videogame market might be to embrace the gaming sector, which has remained popular throughout," begins **Stephanie Norbury**, editor of trade publication 'Coin-Op UK'. "Some companies have already started to offer video SWPs [skill with prizes]: driving games which pay out for fastest laps of the course, for example. People want prizes. People are not that interested in trying to be the best any more. That was only ever going to attract the real gamers in the first place. People want accessible entertainment, which is simple and immersive. Trying to remember button



Namco's O.R.B.S encloses the player in a veritable gaming cocoon. Expect to see the next instalment of *Star Blade* running on it soon

Back to the future

Although many arcade centres are struggling to pull in the punters with new and elaborate rides, there has always been niche market for retro games. Companies such as United Distributing Company are capitalising on this wave of nostalgia and its refurbished cabinets are becoming ever more popular in pubs and clubs, not to mention exports to places such as India and Africa. Prices are approximate but enthusiasts can expect to pick up *R-Type* and *Salamander* for around £1,600. Although UDC also deals in more modern arcade games, it offers a cabinet that contains eight reworkings of classic titles: *Space Invaders*, *Galaxian*, *Frogger*, *Donkey Kong*, *Snake*, *Pong*, *Breakout* and *Pac-Man*. Go to www.udc.co.uk for more.



Theatre of dreams

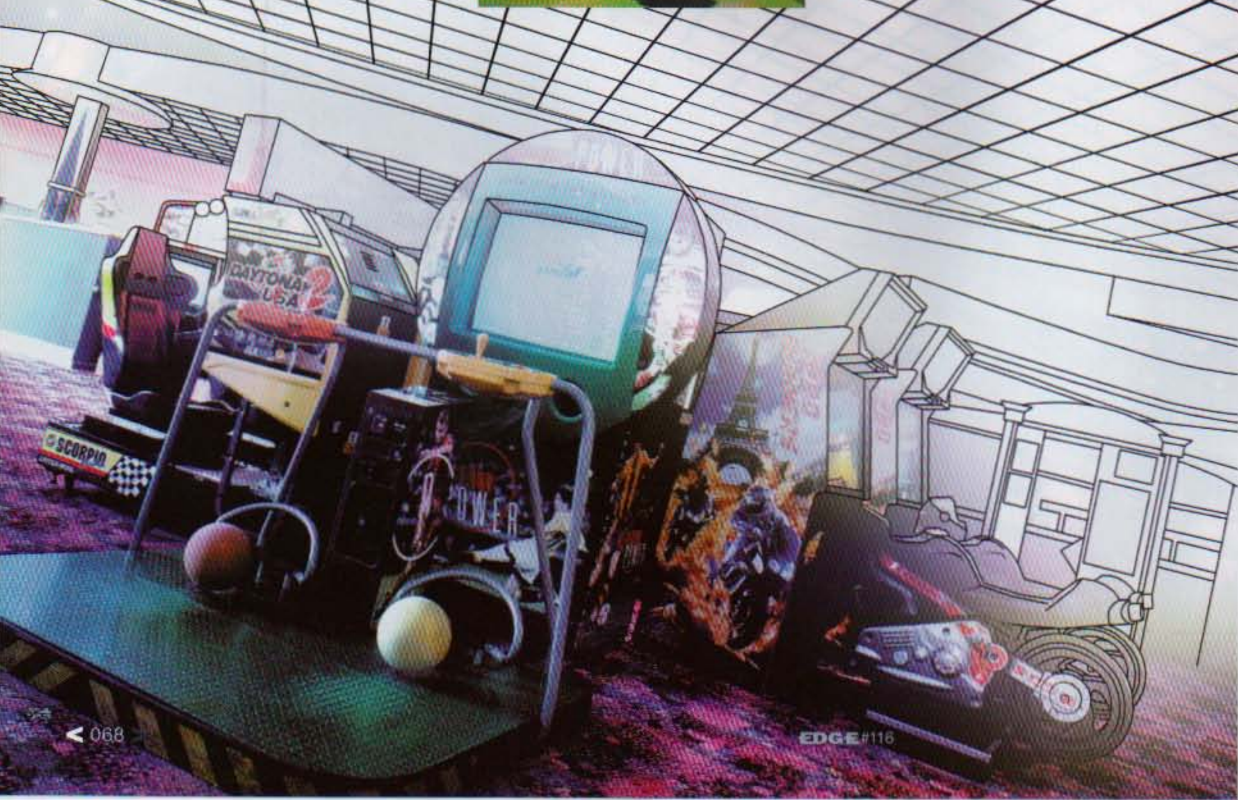
You wouldn't necessarily associate Plato with videogames but his famous cave analogy (used in 'The Republic' to illustrate his views on the nature of perception and reality) became a fitting inspiration for the CAVE project. The virtual reality theatre, sometimes referred to as Cave Automatic Virtual Environment, was engineered in the early '90s at the University of Illinois, though refinements are constantly being made to improving the technology. The idea of CAVE is to fully surround the viewer, or viewers, with images of such a quality that they soon forget they have been displaced from reality. However, though CAVEs have been implemented into places such as museums, for fun education purposes, companies have struggled to come up with convincing, and profitable, entertainment scenarios for the technology. Disney Quest in Orlando, Florida is one exception. A huge area was set aside in 1996 to implement the technology which now sends patrons on epic journeys over rapids and flying through the air on magic carpets. Although the CAVEs can provide reasonable entertainment, methods to further involve the player, so that they can better interact with the environment, need to be found for the technology to really take off.





Out-of-home entertainment just gets more elaborate and dramatic, and as this tech develops, so amusement machines attempt to simulate the experiences





combinations in order to make characters do karate chop back flips is like trying to stuff a mushroom – too much like hard work for very little satisfaction."

Indeed, one of the industry's founding fathers, Nolan Bushnell, did not miss the possibilities of these short 'play-for-play' terminals. In attempting to be a prominent player in this emerging sector, he created uWink. The company represents one of th prominent developers of terminal units for the bar and club market.

"uWink was to have been the first out o the gate to fully implement the ability to 'pay for play' by having a credit card swipe feature," says **Loni Reeder**, an ex-Atarian and co-founder of uWink. "The other plan was to have interstitial advertising betweer tournament game rounds as a means of generating additional revenue. The advertising could be nationally known brands, as well as advertising tailored to the area the unit was in." The company also promised free game downloads to locations on a frequent basis.

A new horizon

Another emerging field, bizarrely, is virtual reality. Once the buzz of the industry, the term is now only uttered with an accompanying snigger. Yet there are companies seeking to explore VR using th latest technology. It seems, then, that virtual reality never went away – it's just been waiting for technology to catch up with the 'high' concept.

Once the industry's Emperor's New Clothes, the science claimed to offer so much, but the hardware delivered so little. The video amusement industry rushed to support VR in 1994 as a new means to incentivise players back to the arcades. Both the UK-designed Virtuality VR hardware and the licensed Sega derivative were heralded as the new frontier. The games, however, proved feeble, and the hardware prohibitively expensive. Some eight years on, the concept has finally found a place in the re-emerging market.

American outfit GlobalVR has produced the Vortek VR platform, which allows the

player to view and control the action via a special mounted goggle system. One of the big successes of the amusement market, the Vortek's ability to run converted consumer PC titles has made quite a stir in the US. Wizard Works' PC port *Beachhead*, a shoot 'em up, has proved a real money-spinner and is rated number one in terms of popularity among vendors.

Over the horizon

Without the grand old men of Japanese video amusement to drive the market, trade associations and publications have become the gathering points for video coin-ops. Leading trade publications, including US-based 'RePlay' magazine and the European alternative 'AB Europe/Coin-Op UK', now find themselves driving the sector's opinion.

"We are trying to keep a good eye on these emerging businesses – which are essentially modelling the ideas put forward by Microsoft and Intel five years ago – while continuing to serve the traditional coin-op market dominated by staples such as music, pool, novelties and touchscreen video hardware and software," explains **Steve White**, the influential editor of 'RePlay' magazine.

New arcade technology has created unique ways to perceive the gaming environment, interact with the game experience, and compete with other players. Some even believe these advancements have led to a whole new industry, rather than simply a reawakening of the old video arcade sector.





"Motion simulation, in specialist capsule systems, has become a big draw, taking players on rollercoaster rides without the worry of tonnes of steel"

Leading the rally to get players away from their sofas are the latest generation of urban entertainment sites, such as Dave & Buster's. These centres attempt to combine adrenaline and alcohol for a new amusement mix. (Still big in the US, the UK centres were closed some time ago, but it's hoped that the baton will one day be picked up and carried again in Europe.)

Interestingly, the arcade sector is learning from the consumer games industry. Facility operators are now focused on buying systems that draw players away from their home games. There are even developments afoot to build systems that use home gaming content in a new amusement mix.

Nicknamed 'Player Terminals', and building on the short-play environment of the touchscreen market, these machines offer casual gamers a thrilling 'burst' of gaming entertainment and come packaged in a system that moves on from conventional upright cabinets and are more suited to projected locations (cinemas, bars and retail outlets). Seen as a totally new strand of the amusement sector, these units are the new wave for the coin-op industry.

Bone shaking

Indeed, companies are investing huge sums of money in out-of-home attractions. The IALF (International Association of Leisure Facilities) and AMOA (Amusement Machine Operators Association) now make a distinction between coin-ops and the larger behemoth machines. These out-of-home attractions are large, experience-driven rides that attempt to offer theme park levels of enjoyment and often have a large throughput of riders.

Certainly, motion simulation, in specialist capsule systems, has become a big draw, taking players on rollercoaster rides without the need to worry about hundreds of tonnes of steel. The leading provider of such systems is Maxflight Corporation, a company that has installed a considerable number of its *VR2002: Roller Coaster* systems around the world. Spinning the two riders in a 360-degree, two-axis motion envelope, it's the most physical



Many manufacturers are linking machines together to encourage competition, such as Sega with *World Club Football Serie A*. Touchscreen technology is also driving the market



MaxFlight systems promise a seat-of-the-pants experience, but it's likely you'll have to look around to find one. And you may get stunning views, but would you go back for more?



Namco's *Ace Driver* pulled in the crowds with multiplayer appeal, but the future lies with link play not only between cabinets sitting alongside each other but between machines located at separate arcades

motion ride to date. And all at your local shopping centre.

But what makes this technology stand out is its 'interactivity' – in some systems the player can even build their own insane 'coaster track. And the company has gone one step further with the development of a monster truck variant, allowing two players to drive their vehicles around an intense course. The system offers an experience, rather than just a conventional game, as addictive as riding the latest steel 'coaster.

"The MaxFlight platform is definitely an out-of-home entertainment attraction," believes **Frank McClintic**, CEO of Maxflight. "It provides the reason to get up off the couch and go to an entertainment venue. MaxFlight systems are usually the lead attraction to a facility. Once the customer is there they will spend money on other attractions and services."





Virtual reality systems such as the Vortek VR platform may be making a comeback, but it's still hard not to look like a prat while using such technology. Virtuality's hardware (above)

"The vigorous motion offered by the TsuMo unit is an exciting addition to the gaming experience, a hundred times more intense than a simple rumble pack"



Tsunami Corporation's TsuMo technology, used here to power the sphere-centric gameplay of *BumpaBall*

The use of a PC-based arcade system also allows these machines to run the latest crop of PC games. Another successful motion simulator developer is Tsunami Corporation, which has created a single-person motion seat that the player rides while taking part in various games based on successful PC content. Along with *Beachhead*, Tsunami has incorporated *MechWarrior 4* and *Crimson Skies*, licensed in a special agreement with Microsoft. The vigorous motion offered by its TsuMo unit is an exciting addition to the gaming experience, a hundred times more intense than a simple rumble pack on a joypad.

So, can video amusements attract and addict a new generation of players, and more to the point, bring in those who were once its lifeblood? The answer is uncertain, but in order to emerge from the flames, video amusements will have to offer something significantly different from the home console experience. They'll also need to be affordable and, more than anything else, a whole lot of fun. It is now up to the coin-op industry to provide these players with enthralling entertainment rather than dream of past glories.





Audience with

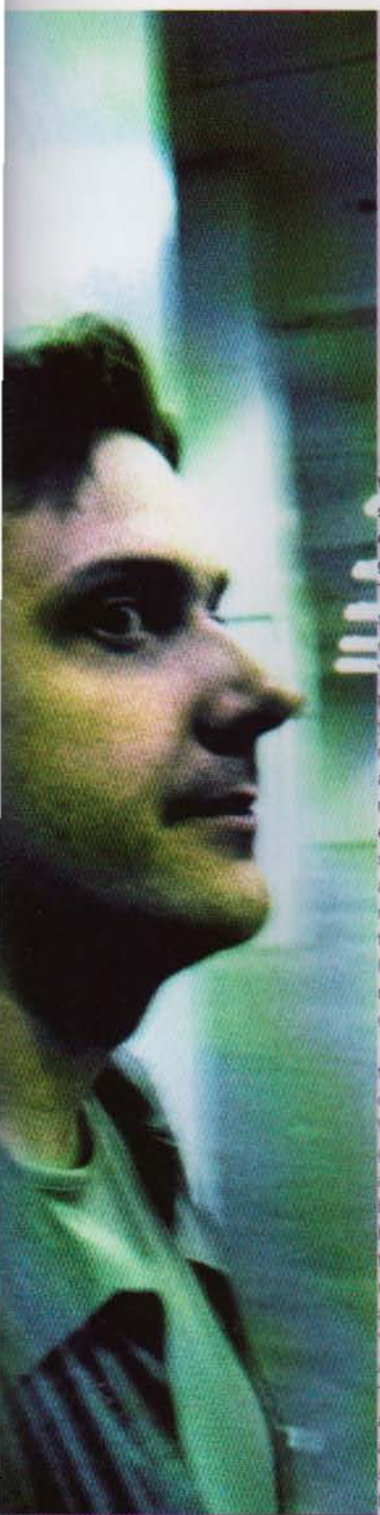
Mark Cerny

president, Cerny Games

Madness to method

Having spent the past 20 years working on a plethora of seminal titles, ranging from *Marble Madness* to *Jak and Daxter*, **Mark Cerny** is a man eminently qualified to offer advice to other developers about the process of creating games. Which is why he was on hand in London to deliver the keynote address at the recent Game Developers Conference Europe, in which he elucidated the Cerny 'Method' for making games. By devoting more effort and resources to the preproduction phase of development, he argues, publishers and developers will benefit from a more cost-efficient process that produces more accomplished games.

Having started out at Atari in 1982, Cerny went on to work with Sega in Japan and the US, where he was involved with the development of *Sonic 2*, before working for Crystal Dynamics and Universal Interactive Studios, where he oversaw the creation of *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon*. Having established Cerny Games as a game design consultancy, he's also worked on existing titles such as *Jak and Daxter*, and a number of forthcoming titles, such as *Ratchet & Clank*.



What are the major changes that you've seen in your time in the industry in terms of the way games are designed and getting a game to market?

The process has changed a lot. In 1982 I started in the industry at Atari's coin-op division and a team was just one person. You'd do your game design, your programming, your artwork, your sound… you'd discuss any special controls that you might want with the group that make controls, and you'd discuss your special hardware needs with the hardware people. Interestingly enough we still made game proposals and submitted them to a committee. It was also an unusual time even for Atari because it was really chaotic. I joined in January of 1982, and that summer the bottom fell out of the market. In the course of three years and four months, I reported to five different people, and our company president changed five times.

So what's changed since then? Obviously teams are a lot larger, and the hardware's fairly consistent instead of changing every time. We've lost a bit of the pioneering spirit, I guess. At Atari during the golden age of the arcade, every time you made a game it had to be absolutely original. If the gameplay had been done before in any way, shape or form, then you couldn't do it that way again. That meant, for example, that if someone had done a *Street Fighter*-style game, you couldn't do it. You had to innovate 100 per cent every time. And it wasn't just Atari, either; if you looked at Tim Skelly's games, like *Star Castle*, *Rip-Off* and *Reactor*, or Eugene Jarvis' games, such as *Defender* and *Robotron*, you'd see the same phenomenon. We were all creating brand new games every time.

Do you think that we've explored the limits of the videogame medium today then, or is there still untapped potential that we've yet to exploit?

Well, if you put it into a modern perspective, what we were making then were minigames. With minigames, there is untapped potential, because minigames don't need to be part of an overarching consistent game world. But as our creations get larger, they demand a higher level of thematic integrity: does your character do things that are appropriate to your character and to your world? Because we really cannot just roll out random experiences and expect players to accept them.

So why do you think audience tastes have changed?

Have audience tastes changed?

Well if they haven't, why are we making games that apparently cater to different tastes?

Well, if you look at *Battlezone* it was a game of exploration – you're out in this fantastic environment, with mountains in the distance, and you're fighting enemies controlling tanks. This would sound immediately familiar to gamers today, but due to the extreme hardware limitations at the time, exploring an environment was little more than navigating an area populated simply by cubes and pyramids. The mountains in the distance were just a backdrop, you couldn't get there, and there was a grand total of three enemy types in the game.

What do we do today? What we do today is have an overarching theme, because players do like to understand the larger context in which a game is occurring. And then we populate our environments with a more interesting set of objects. So perhaps we aren't that far from where we used to be.

> "At Atari, every time you made a game it had to be absolutely original. If the gameplay had been done before, then you couldn't do it that way again"

So how far do you think we've got to go, and do you think we will ever leave these sorts of approaches behind?

PSone to PlayStation2 was a huge leap. That increase in the number of polygons to a factor of 100 really did let us populate a universe better than PSone. Or if you want to look at GameCube, *Pikmin* could not have been done on the N64. Will there be a corresponding increase in what you can do with PlayStation3? Not one as large, but yes there will be, because we really do still run into hardware limitations. Some scenes in today's games have several hundred actors, but setting that up is very time consuming and tricky to do.







The rising costs of development are obviously another limitation, and have presumably been a spur for you to concretise your methodology. Could you give a brief summary of 'Method'?
Sure, there are a few components to it. One is that the typical game doesn't sell very well, so you have to make sure that your game is anything but typical. What you do is make a little piece of what the ultimate game is going to be and you polish it like crazy into what looks like part of a published product. Then you ask, "Is this compelling enough that I should go ahead and make the rest of the game?" At that point, you have an opportunity to cancel the project early if it is just going to be an average title, or pump more resources into it if it looks like it could be very successful.

Also, part of Method is to stay far, far away from documentation, because if you write down what you're going to do on a piece of paper before you start your game, then guess what, you'll end up discussing and analysing words on a piece of paper – when clearly we should all be looking at playable prototypes.

The final thing about Method is that for your game to be a smooth play experience, you need to organise play sessions in which actual consumers play your game and you watch them, so that you can find out what it is that's really working well in the game, and what it is that's not. And then you deal with it.

Obviously one of the characteristics of Method is that it front loads the development effort and investment. How far do you think that the publishing community is mature enough to endorse the process?
In order for it to work with the publishing community it has to be clear that while it is front loading the expense, it is reducing the risk and even reducing the overall average money spent on projects. When you look at the typical publisher, the revenue's coming from just one or two titles, and there are a dozen other titles that would have been less costly if they could have been cancelled early on, because they're not going to recoup their development expenses, let alone their marketing expenses. This is actually a tool that publishers can use to keep costs down.

Another thing that you touched upon was the notion of testing gameplay. Do you think that the development community affords enough importance to testing and testers?
Personally, I'm fantastically interested in how people really play the games I work on. In fact, I've spent four weeks this year watching consumers play games. You learn a tremendous amount from that. I found an amazing thing the other day: a certain number of players, about 10 or 20 per cent, were, in a level that I had designed, walking along to a certain point and then coming to the conclusion that they had come to a dead end and turning around. I can't explain it rationally. All I can say is that at that point there was a longer than normal jump, so for some reason a subset of players concluded they could go no further. You'd never find that without a playtest. That particular obstacle, if not fixed, would have taken those players two or three hours to get get past. So yes, I think it's a very important thing that this industry should devote energy towards.

"If you write down what you're going to do, you'll end up analysing words on a piece of paper – when clearly we should all be looking at playable prototypes"



That particular issue sounds like one of player freedom; how far do you think player freedom is important? On the one hand you've got designers like Warren Spector espousing player freedom and joint authorship, but on the other you have games designed in Japan that adopt a more linear approach. What's your preference?

I don't think there's any best way. *Crash Bandicoot* was quite a linear series, which unlocked its potential to appeal to a wide audience. We had Japanese customers playing the game who would never play a western game. Right now I've been working on freer games, so I miss the linearity.

You've worked in Japan as well as in the west. Do you think there are fundamental differences between the way games are made in the east and the way they're made in the west?

Companies are different in Japan, because the structure there is very hierarchical – Japan is still an environment in which seniority and promotion are very closely linked, for one thing. But in terms of the nuts and bolts of how they make games, I don't know that there's any consistent methodology. Some of the greatest project disasters of all time have occurred at Japanese companies. The top two that come to mind are *Shenmue* – which cost $70m to develop, and they had chop two thirds out of their original game concept in order to finish it – and the other one was Squaresoft's $120m film, 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within'. Japanese companies may be more prone than western companies to believe that their brands will succeed in non-gaming contexts.

Obviously a lot of the games that you've worked on have appealed to a broad audience; how important do you think that is?

It's not necessary to achieve broad audience appeal as long as you have deep appeal to some portion of the audience. So if you make a very good fishing game that appeals to fans of fishing, that should do very well. At the same time, we are a commercial business so there is always the question of whether there are enough people who'll want to purchase games to justify the development costs.

But games such as *Marble Madness* and *Crash Bandicoot* do seem to combine depth and breadth of appeal. Why do you think that is?

I talk to so many people who think that family entertainment is dead. Well of course it's not dead. *Jak and Daxter* is amazing. Jason Rubin believes that the market has shifted, but when I look at it and compare it to the original *Crash Bandicoot*, I can explain the differential in sales for simple reasons. The first is that the original *Crash Bandicoot* sold very well in Japan, which was anomalous. Another factor is that *Jak and Daxter* was released in December, which probably cut about 30 per cent from its sales.

And now, after a relative absence of platformers, there seems to be something of a resurgence right now – *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Jak and Daxter*, *Ratchet & Clank*, *Sly Cooper*.

"I talk to so many people who think that family entertainment is dead. Well of course it's not dead. Jak and Daxter is amazing"

Why do you think that is?

Well there's also *Vexx*, *Haven*, *Scooby Doo*, *Lilo & Stitch*, and even *Tomb Raider* and other games that are peripheral but still very close in spirit. One thing is that these are very difficult games to construct, so they take a long time. That's why we're seeing them all now. By the way, I'm not surprised that there are so many; I'm surprised that there are so few, because this has historically been a popular genre. There hasn't been any strong selling hardware platform without such a title.

Why do you think that is?

It's family entertainment. It's broad and it taps into the child in all of us.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Rocky

The only multiplayer game to get the editorial and art team excited since *Halo*. The inter-office heavyweight championship will begin as soon as deadline is over...



(Xbox, PS2, GC) Rage

Thief: The Dark Project

True, it may be crude in the visual department, but *Thief* still manges to deliver a tense and incredibly open play environment. Definitely worth revisiting.



(PC) Eidos

Commandos 2: Men of Courage

Plot, plan and prepare. Die. Start again, and do it differently. *Commandos 2* is as challenging as they come but it's atmospheric and extremely satisfying.



(Xbox, PS2, PC) Eidos

Samba de Amigo ver. 2000

Shuffle mode adds a new twist – well, a new shuffle, really – to Sega's classic rhythm action title. And Samba Volleyball? Mini Moni can't come quick enough.



(Dreamcast) Sega

Come again?

Whisper it, Edge loves licences and sequels

It goes without saying, when it comes to videogames, **Edge** is something of a purist. And most people would have you believe that purists sniff at sequels and licences, only appreciating true, fresh, brilliant ideas. It is often taken for granted that sequels and licences are the sort of manufactured nonsense that publishers such as EA churn out to formula; they are evil, redundant, destroying the artistry in our industry. They have little to do with our hobby, our passion. Hardcore gamers love The New.

It has been an excellent month for gamers, whatever meaningless adjective you apply to them: hardcore, softcore, Mills & Boon, whatever. Right from the start of the magazine's cycle there's been *TimeSplitters2*, then *Super Monkey Ball 2*, then *Burnout 2* – have you noticed the pattern yet? All sequels, all great, and while purists might consider the *Monkey Ball* sequel to be slightly inferior to its older brother, there's no question that it's still a worthwhile investment. After a quiet summer, **Edge**'s games room has thrilled with multiplatform excitement.

But brilliant as the sequels are, the real attraction in the office has come from somewhere just as hypothetically unlikely as a clutch of twos: *Rocky*. Rage's brilliant arcade boxing game is based on all five films, and a worthy accompaniment to them (flattery, as far as **Edge** is concerned). The beauty is that gamers unfamiliar with the series will admire *Rocky* for its power and simplicity, while film buffs who know little about games will appreciate just how true to the spirit of the celluloid versions it is. And – big shout to the guys in marketing – cross demographic appeal has to be a good thing.

It's a guiding light for the industry on other fronts, too, demonstrating that there are licensing opportunities beyond potential blockbusters – what **Edge** wouldn't give for a 'Breakfast Club' remake of *Skool Daze*. And, perhaps most importantly, that the key factor in a game's worth isn't in its name, be it branded, trademarked or just with a number at the end; it's in how much craft goes into producing it. So licences have their place after all – take note EA. But hold on, what's that on p95? It's *Battlefield 1942*, an EA product with a number at the end, but neither a sequel nor a licence; just a really good game. Goes to show you can't take anything for granted.







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Burnout 2: Point of Impact (PlayStation2)
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The Thing (PC, PS2, Xbox)
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TimeSplitters2

Format: **PS2 (version tested), GC, Xbox** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Free Radical Design** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



Multiplayer is much faster than *Halo*, but the malleable structure makes it worth the effort to adjust your reactions

From the moment *TimeSplitters2* loads, it confronts the player with options. That is not unusual nowadays, and nor is it necessarily desirable, because a lack of focus can lose players from the start. It's all very well being offered the choice of where to go, but how do you know where to begin?

Begin, **Edge** supposes, with the Story mode. Not just because it's the first thing on the menu, but because much of the criticism aimed at the original *TimeSplitters* stemmed from a singleplayer structure perceptibly weaker than those who were expecting a next-generation *GoldenEye* would have wanted. Here they have got just that: next-generation *GoldenEye*, as informed by the first level which takes place at a Siberian dam. It is a deliberate, open nod to the videogame community, a clear statement of intent. Free Radical Design is perceived as the heart and soul of *GoldenEye*, and it appears to be taking back what was its own.

> "The first level takes place at a Siberian dam. It is a deliberate, open nod to the videogame community, a clear statement of intent"







One level in challenge mode sees you destroying villainous cutouts. Points are awarded depending on accuracy, while hitting innocents loses you points

The Story mode takes the player through 12 different time periods, each with their own lead character, enemies, scenery and sets of weapons. Some are more rewarding than others; the classic sci-fi level, for example, performs a pastiche of many a weak FPS, with weak geek weapons and samey scenery, and thus ends up weak itself; while the powerful revolvers and ghost town shoot-out feel of the Wild West level work brilliantly. Levels are over quickly; they are racing circuits where players skim through, shaving seconds from completion times, and reaping the rewards on offer to those who excel.

And this is the interesting thing because, as much as the press and public demanded them, it turns out that singleplayer *GoldenEye* missions are not what they once were. Post-*Halo*, we're used to something more organic, based on player intelligence and reaction. Here, much of the time you'll find yourself under fire from enemy unseen, and forced to reload and retry with foresight. There's a place for *TimeSplitters2*-style adventures – it does what *Medal of Honor* and *Agent Under Fire* attempt, fooling the player into thinking the corridor they're wandering down is a freeform world – but it is no intelligence test, just one of memory and reaction.



While the three versions are superficially identical, the Xbox version benefits from superior loading times an bigger storage space for self-made maps. However, the PS2 controller arguably suits the fast-reaction FPS

The Arcade League is the singleplayer version of multiplayer competition. It gives the player 45 fights to win, working with and against bots across a vast array of game modes. Each has a well-crafted paragraph of ludicrous story backing up the experience. Passing the task results in a bronze, silver, gold or platinum trophy, with higher grades unlocking characters for multiplayer. It's an excellent incentive for replay, but then often just playing is enough; it is so much more freeform than the Story mode, so furious, so fast. So fast, in fact, that it's difficult to comment on AI, since enemies find you and shoot you and hit you and that's it. The pathfinding, on the other hand, is clearly excellent. There are no safe spots in the labyrinthine levels, just places that are easier to defend, and that's where intelligence comes in.

Challenge mode is similar to the Arcade League, but offers more esoteric tasks; clay pigeon shooting with monkeys, for example, or shooting the heads off flaming zombies. There's also a reprise of *TimeSplitters'* original Story mode that demonstrates just how far the singleplayer component of the game has come. Many players, though, will be buying *TimeSplitters2* for the multiplayer aspect. They will not be disappointed.

There is the level editor, of course, but more than that, every option can be changed: levels, weapon sets, bots, challenges, speed, and so on, and so on. The game still falls victim to some things that *Halo* avoided – the hierarchical nature of the weaponry, for example, which plays down the tactics and ups the pace – but the wealth of configuration options inevitably offer more to everyone. Everything has been considered.

That is the thing that sets *TimeSplitters2* apart: consideration. It is so supremely finished in every single way that it's difficult to imagine a more comprehensive experience of the specific type Free Radical set out to provide. The character work is

Previously in E99, E102, E106, E112



















One criticism from *TimeSplitters* players was that it was hard to tell if shots were hitting home, so reactions have been accentuated. Newcomers may still find the lack of blood confusing, however

joyous, the caricatured art and character models both stylish and functional. The music is marvellous, the sound reverb-perfect, the scripting intelligent and witty. In terms of artistic endeavour it is practically peerless, and while parts of the pure arcade-reaction gaming might not be to everyone's tastes, everyone will find something to love.

Imagine: the way six right-hand men dive at a target and away from an explosion, guns blazing; the way a flaming crossbow bolt thuds into an enemy's side as another just misses your head; the way scripted spy action adventures mix seamlessly with stealth and snowbound headshots. That is why the lack of focus is unimportant, because every bit of the game is as worthy as the rest.

Without intentionally punning on the name of Free Radical's forefathers, it is a rare thing: so polished, so wonderful, so incredibly wide.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Super Monkey Ball 2

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Amusement Vision** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**







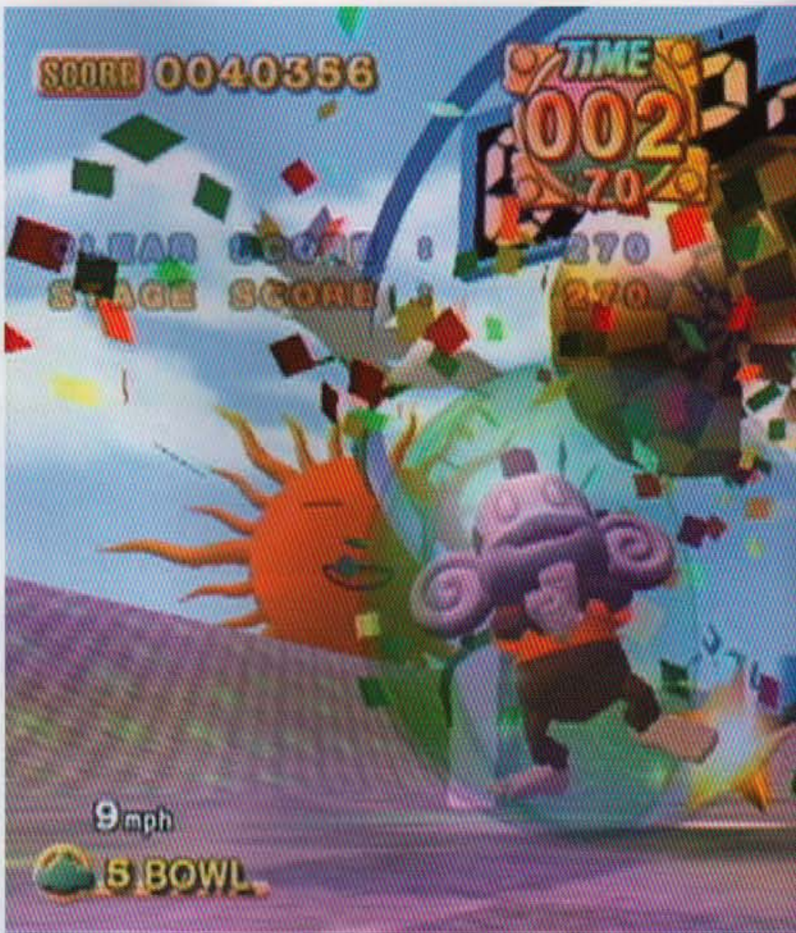
Racing along the river involves using the R and L buttons as your paddles, and is initially confusing. The one-button Soccer is much easier to grasp, while Dogfight is just Target with guns

It's no wonder Nagoshi-san's exhausted, because – predictably, perhaps – there is so much here, and it's difficult to know where to begin. No space to be smart, either, so it seems sensible to start by simply working through the six new minigames that comprise much of the title's appeal.

So: Monkey Shot is the simplest, but also perhaps the most compulsive, a three-level on-rails shooter. It's *Time Crisis* without the gun, colouring-book *Rez*, dependent on speed, accuracy and ammo conservation. Monkey Dogfight is Monkey Target with peanut guns and pineapple rockets, thirdperson flying combat. In twoplayer the tail-chasing is repetitive, and the whole experience would benefit from an easily-executed aerobatic dodge manoeuvre. In fourplayer, like the prequel's Monkey Fight, the lack of subtlety is rendered irrelevant by hysteria. Monkey Boat Race is the weakest of the newcomers, involving too much control delicacy to be immediate in multiplayer. Although the finicky nature is proportionate to the subtlety, it will not capture the attention of those for whom *Monkey Ball* means the chance to game with those who do not game.

More: Monkey Baseball is cleverly implemented, a tabletop baseball game for two players. It is too epic for parties, but perfect for lazy Sunday afternoons. Monkey Soccer is the opposite; hyperactive, haphazard, beautiful, chaotic – not random – and provides the bursts of euphoria you get in all football games from working a five-man (monkey) move. The lack of a fourplayer mode is the only disappointment. Monkey Tennis has that in the form of doubles, and also, conceivably, possesses enough subtlety to broadly negate the need for you to buy a dedicated GameCube tennis game. In genre terms it is closest to *Mario Tennis*, but cruder and crueller.

"It's a larger game than SMB and a different experience – not necessarily a better one, and qualitatively erratic – but recommended"



The bonus levels that appear every so often during Challenge mode are much more complex this time round, and managing to collect all the bananas within the strict time limit is a demanding task



In twoplayer mode, Baseball's bluff and counter-bluff dynamic is amusing, although it makes for lengthy games

All have the forethought and solidity that marked the original six. Those – Target, Fight, Race, Golf, Billiards and the cultish Bowling – are retained and twisted, often in ways that won't please fans of the original. Old courses and habits are removed entirely; Monkey Target, in particular, gets simpler landing zones and a simultaneous flying facelift that, in placing the emphasis on mid-air collection, makes the game more frantic than graceful. Some will regard this as a backwards step, but they will all own the original, and it's easy enough to put that disk in the Cube instead.

Perhaps that's the key point here – that this is not a replacement for *Super Monkey Ball*, or strictly a superlative sequel, but a remix – and one that carries through to the game's focus. The main game can be tackled in two ways. Challenge mode is the same as before, with ten easy levels, 30 normal and 50 expert. However, this is supplemented by a Story mode, where groups of ten levels are provided, which can be tackled in any order. Once a group is finished the player, backed up by infinite continues, can progress to the next. The try/retry dynamic produces a set-up which sits somewhere between Practice and Challenge mode, giving a goal but relieving the pressure, essential given the nature of many of *Super Monkey Ball 2*'s mazes.

Internet criticism has them as random, weighted heavily with luck. Neither of those descriptions is strictly accurate, since success can always be replicated, but the courses certainly don't conform to the simplistic ethic of the original. Structures there were aesthetically plain, the predominant enemies being gravity, inertia and the player's own lack of confidence. Here there are switches, tricks and gimmicks. And rather than there being an obvious solution to each course, several are a case of trial and error. A case in point: some require timing rather than control, a burst of speed when

Previously in E111

















Inertia plays a huge part in *SMB2*; here, Aiai avoids slipping from a curved bank (and off the level) by rolling fast enough around it

the clock hits 40s, perhaps. If the idea of trying, retrying, solving puzzles like that appeals over skating the outrageous narrow curves of the original, then this game will suit. Purists are likely to be disappointed.

But perhaps that's balanced by the other changes. It's a difficult one to call, because while the exploratory trial-and-error ethic means the once-sublime difficulty curve of Challenge mode is now more porcupine, those upset by that should be consoled by the wealth of polished subgames. That's the thing; there is so much here, a lot to do. It's a larger game than *Super Monkey Ball* and a different experience – not necessarily a better one, and qualitatively erratic – but unquestionably recommended.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





Arthropod is one of *SMB2*'s more controversial levels. It consists of four rotating wheels separated by short gaps, the last of which hosts the exit, and a four-legged creature pacing on top

Burnout 2: Point of Impact

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Criterion** Price: **£40** Release: **October 11**





Crikey. Chances are that in the time it would take you to break into your first powerslide in most other racing games, *Burnout 2* has already thrown a handful of heart-stopping moments in your path. Given the number of racing games **Edge** receives for review every year, anything that distances itself so rapidly and so convincingly from the depressingly similar, lazily thought out pack has to be special.

Just like *Burnout*, then. And like its predecessor, *Point of Impact* is a game you learn, a game you get better at. That may sound obvious but it's not simply a case of memorising the courses and traffic patterns – a particular state of mind is necessary in order to play this properly. Playing it properly means taking risks: it means keeping the right analogue stick pushed fully forward when common sense is urging you to pull it right back; lining your vehicle up to split the two lorries coming towards you rather than taking the easy way around; forcing yourself not to let go of the boost button until there's no nitro left in the meter; and having absolute confidence in your ability to carve mercilessly through road users at 160mph.

"Burnout 2 is the perfect embodiment of the 'bigger, better, more' sequel mentality. Everything it does, it does at full throttle"

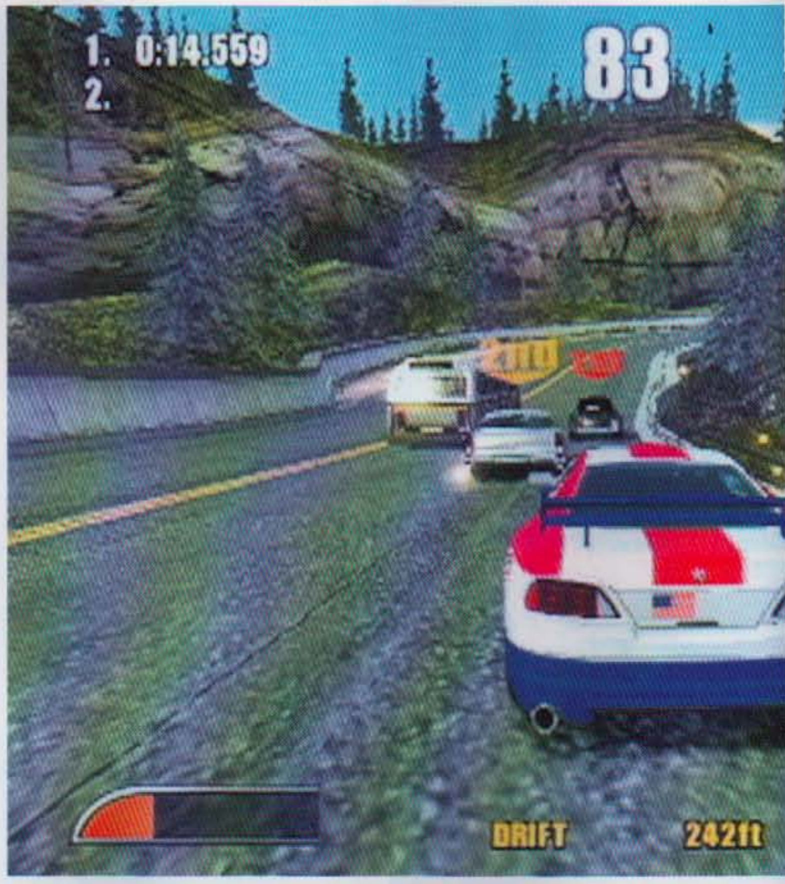


One of the more sedate bonus cars (above) – the variety of vehicles is good. Although not officially announced, a GC version seems likely. Xbox owners, however, may miss out which seems remarkable given that it's exactly the kind of game Microsoft's console requires

Unlike *Burnout*, this is a far more complete game. More than a higher polygon count covered in richer textures, it's the way the entire experience holds together. For instance, the manner in which Face Off, Point to Point and the new Pursuit (think Chase HQ) races are integrated into the championship structure thereby adding variety and extinguishing monotony. It's the overwhelming sensation that the courses have been extensively reworked and refined to maximise enjoyment (and that they work equally well when reversed). Or the fact that almost every element of the presentation (both visual and, particularly, aural) now ranks alongside what you'd expect from a Japanese arcade racing specialist such as Sega. *Burnout 2* feels far more confident and better realised – a genuine evolution.



The Pursuit mode in action. It's slightly flawed but is a worthwhile and welcome addition to *B2*



Graphical quality is vastly improved – at times the lighting is spectacular. The inclusion of superb point-to-point tracks incorporating sections from two courses adds an extra edge to the already tense racing

There are one or two genetic mutations, though. Pursuit mode suffers from the *Wreckless* complex (the force with which you ram your opponent's car appears to make no difference to the amount of damage caused) which is a frustrating and elementary error. In addition, progression in the Custom Car Championship is too reliant on first place finishes. This feels unnecessarily restrictive and isn't helped by the tendency for the same car to always win – just one bad race and the likelihood of making up the points difference is anorexic, essentially forcing you to restart the series. A shame given that the normal championship is well balanced. Other than that, **Edge** is disappointed to note that the PS2's link-up feature has again not been taken advantage of (although splitscreen junkies should be sated).

But given the overall quality of the game these are minor abnormalities. *Burnout 2* is the perfect embodiment of the 'bigger, better, more' sequel mentality and nothing about it could be categorised as tentative. Everything it does, it does at full throttle and flat out – it just doesn't know any other way. Which is precisely what makes it one of the most exhilarating and rewarding videogame rides you're likely to encounter and the very reason PS2 owners should have this near the top of their Christmas list.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Previously in E112, E114













Crashes are now a lot more convincing and the multi-angle replay camera has been dropped in favour of a continuous, panning alternative







Occasionally, your CPU friends mess up which is particularly satisfying (left). Traffic AI seems more advanced although it wasn't the most immediately noticeable improvement. Weather effects such as snow are well implemented. Anamorphic, 60Hz and excellent Pro Logic II compatibility is included



Accidental hero

While the essence of the *Burnout* franchise is maintained in this sequel, a few extras have been added. Crash mode offers 15 segments taken from the game's courses for you to cause ridiculously big, stupidly expensive accidents. That it proves compelling isn't particularly surprising. That it can easily provide an entire evening's entertainment, more so. In addition, cheat options such as Runaway (no brakes) and Invulnerable open up as you play through the game. *Burnout 2* is a true digital toy box.

Ikaruga

Format: **Dreamcast (version tested), GameCube** Publisher: **ESP** Developer: **Treasure** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



In a climate of extreme sports, identikit racers and FPSs of unabashed mediocrity, it would be considered commercial suicide for any modern publisher to convert an ostensibly forgotten genre to a console whose launch was infamously described as "DOA" back in 1998. And yet this is exactly what Treasure has done, by bringing last year's Naomi shooter to Dreamcast. To the victor go the spoils? Architectural similarities aside, *Ikaruga* is perhaps the finest and most befitting swansong for Sega's ill-fated console, an apt summary of the notion of 'hardcore' in terms of graphics, gameplay and sheer aesthetics.

"The game is tough. Very tough. Ikaruga is at the very least, merciless, often bordering on unfair. Bordering, mind, not crossing"





Ikaruga's boss destruction sequences result in a spectacular array of light and smoke as the structure burns, before exploding to pieces. The perfect reward

Those that have followed the progress of the home port of *Ikaruga* will be aware of Treasure's official stance being that it doesn't make sequels. Forum fanboys have been adamant and yet the familiarity of the ship design, the continuing storyline and the tagline 'Project RS2' suggest otherwise. *Ikaruga* is more a 'spiritual successor' to the seminal *Radiant Silvergun*, than an outright sequel. Irrespective, the brickwork is there – drawn conclusions regarding the chronological status of the game are unimportant, as pressing 'power' will prove.

Certainly, **Edge** will attest that graphics make a good game, but they bolster an already great one immeasurably. The conversion (save for trace slowdown during the spectacular boss demises) is flawless. This is Dreamcast at the visual redline. Details are of little value, screenshots marginally more so. Realise, *Ikaruga* can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the best on Xbox and PS2 and be proud. Indeed, to play is the only way to see. Sound matches perfectly and everything has the Treasure soul that fans will recognise from *Gunstar Heroes* through *Yuke! Yuke! Trouble Makers* to *Sin and Punishment*.

Negotiating the game is simple. There are choices for a Tutorial, or a Trial game, where the first two levels can be attempted in Freeplay mode. Practice allows the selection of any of the game's previously-completed five chapters and the game sums the total number of hours played (gameplay, not power-on time). Unlockable extras include





When releasing the charge bar, it's worth considering which alignment your ship is set to – the resultant laser will gravitate to opposing enemies. In *Ikaruga* strategy remains ever-present, even in the 'smart bomb' ethic

galleries, sound tests and Arcade and Prototype modes, where ammo is limited, refillable only by absorbing enemy fire.

Conversely, playing the game is tough. Very tough. *Ikaruga* is at the very least, merciless, often bordering on unfair. Bordering, mind, not crossing. Shades of *Layer Section*, *Gradius* and *R-Type* pervade in terms of the precision required to survive, as well as committing enemy patterns to memory. The system will be recognisable to those who have experienced Treasure's *Silhouette Mirage* for Saturn/PlayStation; namely the ability to switch the ship between black and white modes.

Aggressors appear in the same guises, black or white and destroying either when aligned to that colour releases 'suicide bullets' that can be collected to fill the charge bar – engage this for a barrage of guided laser fire. Moreover, flak matching the player colour will not cause damage, although the vessels themselves will.

Such a simple mechanic brings about a strategy hitherto unseen in shooters of this ilk. Where *Radiant Silvergun* had three-way colour-coding, it was still possible to finish the game without bothering to 'chain-up' multiple hits of the same hue. Not so with *Ikaruga*: one is often caught in the crossfire of both colours and flicking back and forth between alignments is of paramount importance. The end of the third level is a mash that forces the player to negotiate tiny rotating gaps, constantly switching modes while avoiding physical barriers and opposing 360-degree fire. The fourth level is a Herculean task.

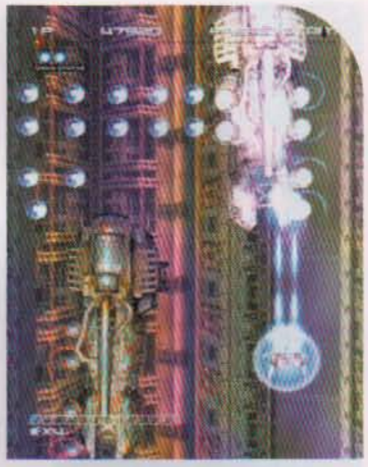
Treasure has once again distilled a potent, unforgiving, stunning, dramatic and overall monstrous number that, while not completely innovative (having adopted the self-referential colour system), thrills and enrages in equal measure. A case for the cream of the crop? Undoubtedly.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**

Previously in E100, E113







Mayors are the expected multi-limbed hulks, but the twist lies in their twin colour alignment. Absorbing bullets of one colour still requires dodging opposing fire (left). It's a dynamic that's as carefully thought out as the rest of the game





Full tilt

Exponents of the 2D blasting genre will remember many vertical offerings for Saturn that came with a 'Tate mode'. *Ikaruga* resurrects this and, once activated, the display is rotated 90 degrees to the right, whereupon the television is rotated 90 degrees in the opposite direction. This allows the game to take advantage of a bigger display where much of the screen would be wasted on a horizontally-orientated 4:3-ratio television. Be aware, though – flipping a TV set can result in disturbing the shadow mask, causing colour shift and permanent saturation damage.









Chaining enemies of the same kind will up the point score, ergo, choosing to destroy attackers of the same colours is an obvious benefit. Accuracy and bravery are prerequisite for learning to ignore specific targets

Rocky

Format: **Xbox (version tested), GC, PS2, GBA, PC** Publisher: **Rage** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





Training is essential if you're to go on to win the World Heavyweight crown. Unfortunately, there's no chasing a chicken to improve the foot work

"Yo, Adrian!" "Ain't gonna be no rematch." "Cut me, Mick." "How's the turtle food this week?" Classic quotes from a classic film. (Okay, admittedly the last one's in there for hardcore 'Rocky' fans.) It's all powerfully evocative stuff and the story of a no-hoper making good against all the odds contains an unmistakable poetry. An aged licence, a cross-platform strategy, a team of coders employed by Rage? Hardly credentials to inspire confidence. But Rage Newcastle Studio should be heartily congratulated – it has delivered with an effervescent and adroit reworking of a franchise that lost its power shortly after Ivan Drago uttered the words, "He is not human. He is like a piece of iron." (The less said about 'Rocky V', the better.)

As soon as you slip the game disk into your console and the famous 'Rocky' theme tune kicks in you know you're in for a sterling experience, but what follows is much better than **Edge** had anticipated. Rage has captured the essence of Stallone's scripts, moronic acting and OTT fight sequences with remarkable flair.

"Don't be too surprised by the high mark: even though it'll be too demanding for some, Rocky represents the best boxing title on the market"

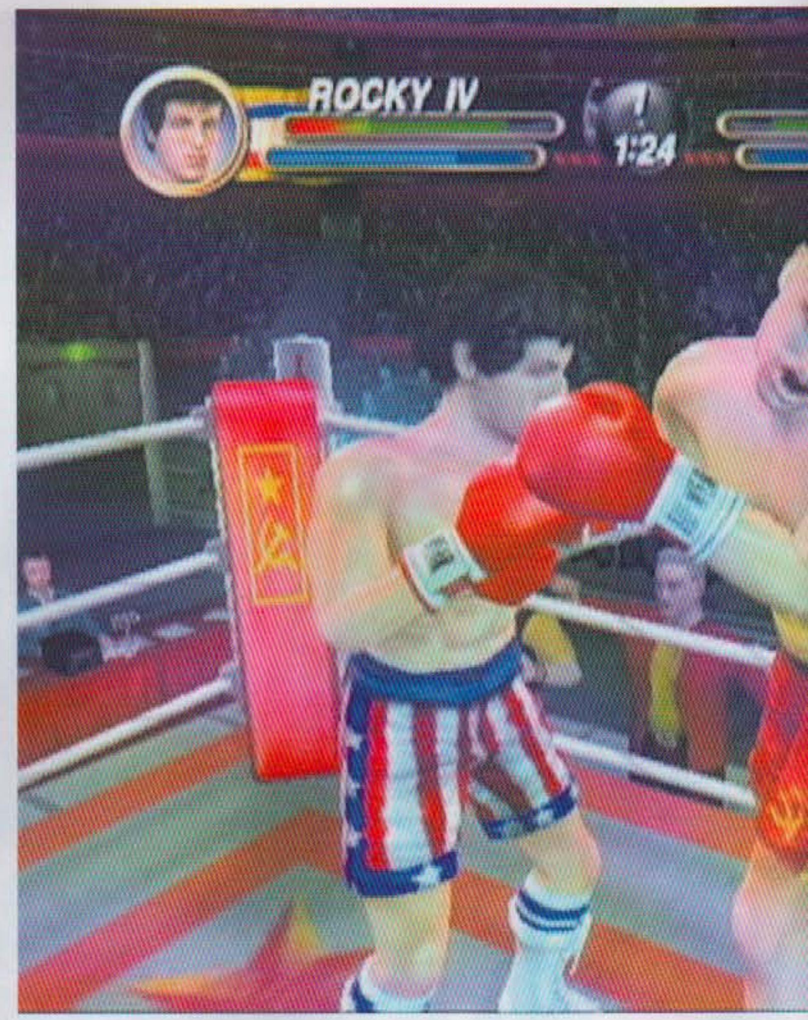
Movie mode sees Rocky starting life in dismal arenas fighting other no-hopers such as Spider Rico and Dipper Brown, until Apollo Creed makes an entrance. His momentous decision to give a plucky unknown the chance of taking his crown sets the player on a journey that vividly mirrors the films' magic. Movie clips, samples from all five films and tongue-in-cheek cut-scenes combine to add atmosphere and impetus to the boxing action. And all opponents, including luminaries such as Clubber Lang, Ivan Drago and Tommy Gunn, can be unlocked for the multiplayer mode once beaten. Hulk Hogan doesn't make the final cut, but then you can't have everything.

The boxing itself is easily the best 3D interpretation of the sport to date and makes all other contenders, such as *Ready 2 Rumble* and *Mike Tyson's Boxing*, look like punch-drunk hasbeens surviving on past glories. To say the boxing is 'convincing' is misleading, however. The ham-slapping, cucumber-crunching sound effects so evocative in the films has been captured magnificently and when punches connect, they really connect. The fighters' animation is accomplished, and when you lift an opponent fully off the ground with a shot to the breadbasket it's enough to make you wince.





Get KO'd and you have to repeatedly press the A button to recover. Stay down longer to boost flagging energy



The singleplayer mode is superb, but get together with some friends for a session in Exhibition mode and you can expect whoops and hollers to rival the best multiplayer games. If he dies, he dies

Strategy and use of the ring is particularly important for success and though the first couple of boxers can be defeated with button bashing, all later opponents require fast footwork and skilful combos to take down. There are occasional glitches in AI, (feinting around to the side of opponents to deliver hooks and body shots proves successful in many cases) but in general adversaries react convincingly to counter any one-punch strategies.

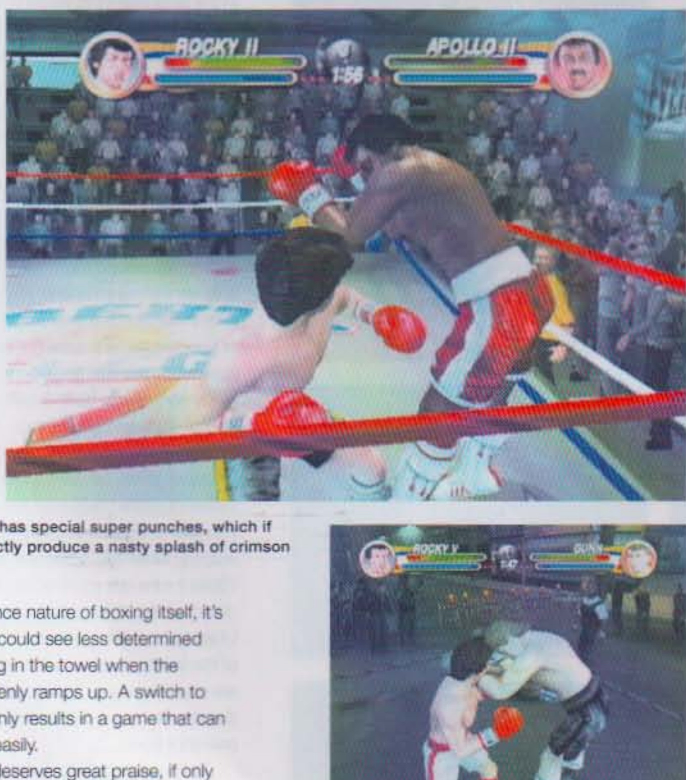
Indeed, learning the game's combos is absolutely vital for success, though a helpful sparring mode will soon see the more complex and effective combos mastered. And it's here where the game excels. On Contender mode the game is initially very hard. Even to the point of frustration. But once you begin to string combinations together and learn how to press an advantage, the game opens up. Eventually beating a seemingly impervious opponent in a 15-round epic is uniquely satisfying.

The game's only weakness is a learning curve that could be more accurately represented by a wavy line. Although it could be argued that this faithfully patterns the













The sparring mode is not just a gimmick, but seriously helps to improve your technique. The opponent's boxing style can be adjusted

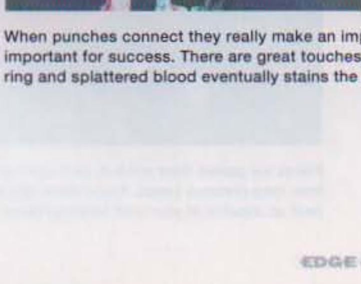


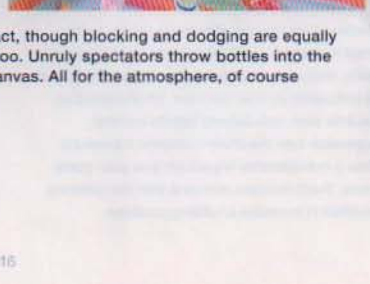
Each character has special super punches, which if pulled off correctly produce a nasty splash of crimson

challenge/defence nature of boxing itself, it's too erratic and could see less determined players throwing in the towel when the challenge suddenly ramps up. A switch to Novice mode only results in a game that can be beaten too easily.

Yet *Rocky* deserves great praise, if only for a splendid revival of a licence many thought was brain-dead. Don't be too surprised by the high mark: even though it'll be too demanding for some, *Rocky* currently represents the best boxing title on the market. And our prediction for the last fight in the game? Pain.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





When punches connect they really make an impact, though blocking and dodging are equally important for success. There are great touches, too. Unruly spectators throw bottles into the ring and splattered blood eventually stains the canvas. All for the atmosphere, of course



Licence reworked

Rage is hardly the first company to resurrect an ancient licence and if the likes of *Rocky* and *Terminator: Dawn of Fate* do well at retail, gamers can expect a raft of similar '80s film tie-ins. However, although Sega's excellent *Rocky* (1987) for the Master System managed to capture the histrionic spirit of the films it went pretty much unnoticed by the general public. **Edge** sincerely hopes that this lovingly crafted effort fares better.

Quantum Redshift

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Curly Monsters** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**













High-speed combat is executed with spectacular aplomb. The attention to detail in design is obvious at all stages of play, especially with regards to the clear and informative heads-up display that you can see here



Points are gained from combat, pick-ups and from long-distance jumps. These allow you to beef up aspects of your craft between races



Talent spotting

Between races you are able to spend the points earned in combat and track-stunts on upgrading shields, weapons and thrust. It's simple, but it does add noticeably to your machine. Characters also have their own well-defined talents and the progression over the short tournament sessions makes a considerable impact on how your game evolves. Such features combine with the glittering presentation to create a fulfilling package.

Quantum Redshift updates the techno-rocket-sled genre for Xbox with a measured pixel punch to the retina. A genuine contender for the next-generation futuristic-racer heavyweight title, some gamers will no doubt be thirsty to compare this to the *Wipeout* series. *Quantum Redshift* does lack some of the vertiginous edginess of *Wipeout Fusion*, but the balance and precision of the racing means it steps ahead of the PlayStation2 racer on a number of fronts.

The pace and arc of the racing is always on a high, although the music, colours and general ambience of the game lack the frenetic amphetamine beat that some future racers try to convey. The action is no less enjoyable for this and offers a deft charm of its own, presenting each track in the language of its home country and leading with a beat 'em up-style character-driven dynamic. Each character has their own home track and will receive a personalised insult from rival racers. There's a typically spurious relationship with the nemesis character too, ending in a one-on-one challenge race for each title.

The racing itself is comfortably familiar in the way it leads the player's eye and responses around the track and there are only occasional moments when control is lost to the blur of scenery and the splatter of spectacular lens-splash effects. Track power-ups are well judged too, their placement on the track encouraging more daring leaps and greater high-speed risks.

The standard weapons are offset by shields that can be used to cover your rocket-powered behind at the crucial moment of impact; you're given plenty of warning when the projectiles are inbound. When it runs out you'll rapidly be smacked down, ending the race a burning mess. Unless of course you make judicious use of the few seconds of turbo boost that are supplied to you, giving a precious thrust-over-time rather than a single one-shot boost.

This is a game that does what you'd expect very well indeed, leading beginners and twitch experts alike into familiar realms of on-the-fly timing and high-speed judgement. Not worth buying an Xbox for, but certainly worth buying for your Xbox, *Quantum Redshift* is an attractive and welcome reinstatement of the genre.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Auto Modellista

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), 2003 (UK)** Previously in **E**106, **E**112

Two hours and 47 minutes. That's how long it took **Edge** clear *Auto Modellista*'s oneplayer mode. But the game can easily be 'finished' sooner – a substantial portion of those 10,020 seconds were spent in the garage customising **Edge**'s all-conquering Civic Type-R.

This part – upgrading performance parts received from success in races, altering the appearance of your vehicle (both bodykit and decal additions), etc – is beautifully accomplished and thoroughly enjoyable. It allows you to personalise your car in a manner impossible in most of today's racing games. This, **Edge** realises, is *Auto Modellista*'s fundamental aspect – tune up, dress up and go online to show off against a competitor.

There are just a couple of problems with this. First, the online side of the equation is likely to be unsolvable by most players outside of Japan, thereby crippling the game's potential (a worthy lesson should be drawn from this for the planned PAL release).

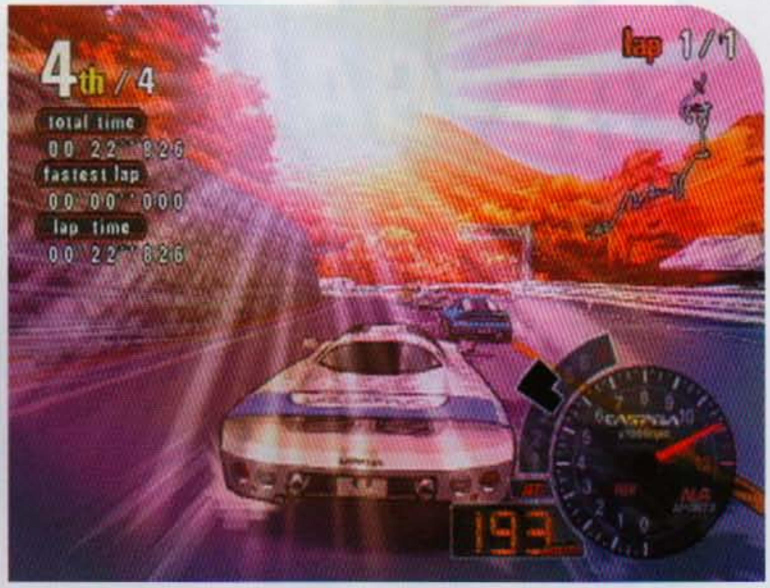
Second, *Auto Modellista* displays what has to be one of the most archaic handling systems **Edge** has battled with in recent years. While still adequate on fast, open circuits, the vile nature of the dynamics only fully reveals itself on tracks where tighter directional changes are required frequently and quickly. Sadly, entire levels of complexity are missing from the game's driving model. Add in the stubborn stupidity displayed by your AI opponents and the resulting experience is unnecessarily aggrieving.

In its defence, *Auto Modellista*'s focus really isn't on the racing (a fact reinforced by the poor thought that has gone into race progression in singleplayer championships). Yet it remains a crucial component and is so flawed that it inevitably affects the game's entire dynamic. And given how captivating car enthusiasts should find the customising options available to them this just seems terribly wasteful.

Edge rating: Four out of ten











You get the occasional moment of slowdown but most will be too enthralled in *Auto Modellista*'s gorgeous looks to care. A tie-in with Japanese R/C giant Tamiya allows you to race a 1/10th scale version of your car on the model maker's official track (left). It's a rather charming touch



Auto Modellista's handling model offers frustrating layers of understeer – you get used to it eventually, but it really is stuck at an elementary level of vehicle dynamics and it reveals the lack of focus on racing



Garage life

Given the amount of time spent customising your car, Capcom obviously thought it logical to include the ability to totally customise your garage, too. A huge variety of items (toolboxes, trolley jacks, tyres, shelf units, posters, etc) unlocks by playing through the game and you're free to place them within your chosen environment. You can then take the camera on a tour around your environment. As with the car tweaking, you'd be surprised just how compelling this can prove.

Battlefield 1942

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Epic/Digital Illusions** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E114**

The promise of a large-scale multiplayer vehicular title has seldom been realised with much vigour on the PC, despite a wealth of promises. *Tribes 2* managed it, but with a huge demand on player numbers and an exceptionally complicated game dynamic. There hasn't been much else of note, aside that is from *Battlefield 1942*.

Astoundingly it seems that Electronic Arts doesn't have high hopes for this game and as a result coverage has been rather limited. In fact, it might not shift many units to the PC massmarket, but it is going to make an impact that outweighs almost anything else since the duel between *Quake* and *Unreal* in 1999. The eye-candy addicts with an arcade twitch will be lusting after *Unreal Tournament 2003*, but it is the scope and ambition of *Battlefield 1942* that is raising many eyebrows.

Battlefield 1942 puts you in the position of an infantry trooper, choosing between a number of different classes. With that sorted, you enter one of the many battlefields of World War II. From Iwo Jima to Kursk, Stalingrad to Omaha Beach, all the highlights of that most vicious conflict are included.

The central game mode sees both sides struggle for control of key positions. The more of the map you dominate the slower your reinforcement tickets are depleted. Take the whole map and exhaust the enemy and you've won. This premise will sound familiar to anyone who's played a recent PC shooter, but the difference in *Battlefield 1942* is the intuitive implementation of over 30 vehicles. From planes to gun turrets, jeeps and half a dozen tanks, to bombers and even an aircraft carrier: you can play with it all.

The ease with which this has been set up and the scale on which the tightly focused combat takes place make *Battlefield 1942* an awe-inspiring and endlessly varied multiplayer experience. The possibilities for organised team combat are simply staggering, though you'll need more than ten-aside to make the most of many of the game's vast environments.

Edge can't help feeling that the maps might end up being a little empty, with Europe simply not having a large enough community to sustain it. However, for sheer ambition alone *Battlefield 1942* wears a badge of courage, rewarding it for actions beyond the call of duty.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten






Planes are really tricky to use effectively, but like all the vehicles in *Battlefield 1942* they provide a massive boost to the objectives of the infantry






Different types of troops come armed with different equipment sets, including medical packs, sniper rifles and anti-tank weaponry. Anyone can use any type of vehicle though, regardless of their initial class

A taste of the old

It's the versatility of experience that makes *Battlefield 1942* so refreshing for PC FPS fans. Manning a flak AA gun or driving a jeep comes with the same ease as sniping an enemy at 2000 yards or bailing out of a plane. Although each of the maps is huge, to accommodate the vehicular antics, the battle is deftly focused on key objectives, helping to implement a feeling of actually being involved in the battlefield action. This is one game that really does live up to its name.

Shox

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**114

The competition is fierce. Not just in this game, but in the genre as a whole. As a result, driving games may seem like they get a bit of a beating from **Edge**. Nothing could be further from the truth and to get a six a game must be enjoyable, technically accomplished and better than most of the other bland efforts that will be hitting retail outlets from now until Christmas. *Shox* is all these things, but for all the game's bombastic overtones it fundamentally fails to thrill as much as the EA Big brand label promises.

There's a valiant attempt at novelty, and for that EA should be heartily commended, but the Shox Zone feature has less impact than we anticipated. On each circuit there are three timed zones, with gold, silver and bronze awards given depending on how fast you negotiate each zone. The idea, of course, is to try and attain three golds before the end of the race. Achieve this and a completely ridiculous Shock Wave feature is unleashed on the player (see Life through a fish-eye lens). But entering the wave merely increases the money earned for your race, which is where the game falls a little flat.

The problem is, the cash handouts for completing each race (any of which can be attempted a limitless number of times) are just too generous, effectively devaluing the game's currency and rendering the Shock Wave feature somewhat redundant. It's also possible to gamble your cash on new vehicles, but again, fail to win and on the next attempt the CPU will generously offer you the same vehicle for half the gambling cost. Any competent driver will never feel as if their balance is ever in jeopardy.

The racing itself has been built around the 'every corner sideways' principle and is immediate, fun and engaging. However, a lack of sensory feedback, both through the DualShock's rumble facility and in the audio department, results in a car that never quite feels as though it's fully connected to the ground. Certainly, the sense that you're driving across different road surfaces isn't conveyed as well as in *World Rally Championship*, for example.

Shox is a decidedly professional package buffed up to deliver enough thrills to keep any driving enthusiast content for a few days. A typical EA product, then.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

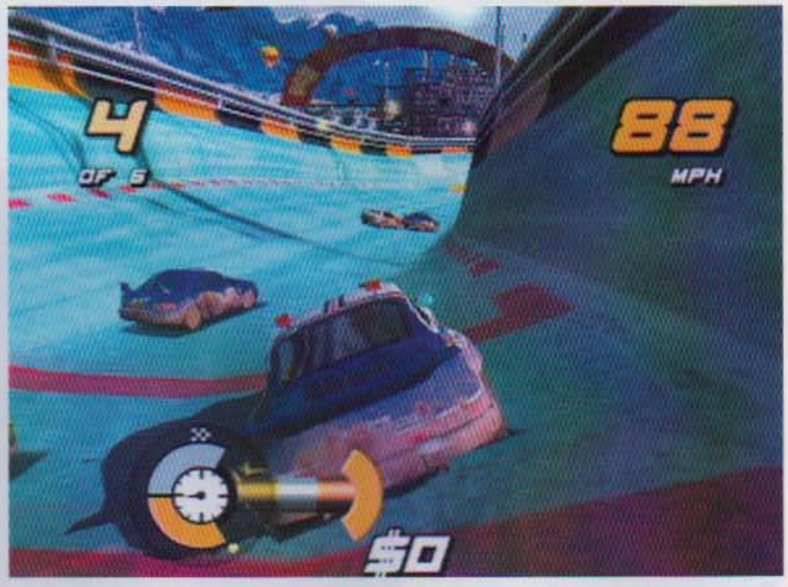








Expect enthusiastic commentary and glitter when you complete a Shox Zone segment. Three golds will trigger the disorientating Shock Wave





Life through a fish-eye lens

Been for an eye test recently? *Shox* manages to capture that pre-test eye droplet blur with alarming accuracy. Once the Shock Wave has been triggered it passes along the track carrying along any vehicle that manages to keep up. The edges of the screen distort while the sound mimics something approaching waves washing against a pebble beach. Don't expect it to improve your driving, however. There's no speed boost, just an overwhelming feeling of disembodiment.





The multiplayer games (left) include traditional head-to-head races and tag games which are neither original nor overtly thrilling. A driving game would hardly be complete without a bridge to traverse (right)

Way of the Samurai

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Eidos (Fresh Games)** Developer: **Acquire** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**105









Thoughtful swordplay is well rewarded, as only good technique earns you the more complex moves needed to progress









As in *Ocarina of Time*, specific moments throughout the two days of game time trigger a range of tasks. The subtitles add to the serene but surreal atmosphere, though dubbing would have been preferable

Freeform gaming

Way of the Samurai's multi-path adventure element was perhaps the biggest factor behind the game's success in Japan. And though it would be easy to overstate the freeform nature of the game (because certain events and finales seem to crop up whether you seek them or not) even when **Edge** tried to repeat adventures exactly, it failed. More impressively, with game scenarios that encompass the discovery of illicit inter-family liaisons and the guarding of prams, *Way of the Samurai* can also lay claim to an uniquely powerful and diverse narrative too.

After the high-concept Japanorama of *Mr Moskeeto* and *Mad Maestro!*, Acquire's *Way of the Samurai* initially appears an odd third release for Eidos' Fresh Games imprint. Set in the dog days of Japan's feudal system and featuring a somewhat unwieldy combat system, the ragged-looking samurai sim that is *Way of the Samurai* hardly screams for your attention. Add a small and all-too-bare gameworld to the mix, along with many many subtitled-because-they-couldn't-be-bothered-to-dub-them cut-scenes to click through, and the prognosis looks worse.

But while the look and feel of *WotS* is generic at best, the central game mechanic is exquisite. Launching you straight into a bitter inter-clan conflict between the Akadama and the Kuruo, *WotS* gives you two game days of relative freedom to settle the conflict once and for all. As soon as you've named and robed your hero, only your actions will determine whether you enrol in either clan, or float somewhere between the two. As an adventure it plays like *Onimusha* meets *Deus Ex* meets *Ocarina of Time*. Or rather it has pretensions to do so.

Slowly the gameworld starts to make sense. The pleasure to be had in *WotS* comes from replaying sections again and again until you resolve the conflict in a manner befitting of a samurai. That's not to say the game is humourless or alienatingly authentic – because, as soon becomes clear, the initially daunting 1878 setting works as an expressionistic piece rather than a period drama. Witness the comedy Afro-American Samurai, or Chelsea, the English princess on the run from a Gaultier wardrobe. Indeed, after a while, your eyes become completely samuraised, as the plot unravels and you pick up nuances of character, plot and comedy that were hitherto invisible.

The fighting system also improves. As you master the delicate parry and push brutalities of samurai fighting so exhaustingly detailed in the game's near endless tutorial, you earn more moves. Experiment further with stances and timing and your fighting will improve further still. And there are sword upgrades to be fought for, or bought, too.

Wherever you look there's evidence of subtlety and care. *Way of the Samurai* might be slight and hold ideas above its station, but the curious will find it an interesting martial arthouse alternative to *Onimusha*'s box office blockbuster.

Edge rating: **Six** out of ten

Sega GT

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Sega** Price: **£40** Release: **November 1** Previously in **E**114

The level of detail that goes into racing games is a massive variable. Some rely on the punch of visual splendour for success; others seek to swing the buying decision with realistic physics or licences. Rarely does a game hit every nail on the head, consecutively and squarely. *Sega GT* is just such a game. It's accessible enough to appeal to the casual gamer, but scratch the surface, and you find an experience rich in detail. Taking its cues from the *Gran Turismo* series, *Sega GT* involves trading and racing, spending winnings on performance-enhancing upgrades, and progressing through a series of licence tests in order to race in tougher (and more lucrative) events.

Sega GT allows the gamer to progress at their own pace. You can choose to generate cash racing the same events, but when the challenges tail off, the advanced licences beckon, and tougher events are unlocked. The constant drip-feed thrill of the upgrade, more common to RPGs, is qualified by the detailed physics model, which emphasises the broad range of performance and handling characteristics between different cars. While *Sega GT*'s conceptual originality may be in question, its quality is not.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









The Chronicle mode is one of *Sega GT*'s finest aspects, and also distinguishes it from Polyphony's *Gran Turismo* series. Other neat touches include a snapshot function that lets you put photographs of your favourite race moments in your garage. As for the driving? It's more than competent but hardly sets a new genre benchmark

Petit Copter

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Aqua System** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**









It's possible to interact with objects to a limited degree in the game. Pressing the 'fire' button produces a reticle that opens some doors and can even turn on computers and TV sets. Hover close to smaller items, like the desk calendar, and it will begin to shift revealing the star beneath

You won't find many western developers taking a punt with a helicopter simulation game – and even fewer gambling their reputation on one involving remote-controlled models. (Especially after the disaster that was Shiny Entertainment's *RC Stunt Copter*.) But Aqua could always anticipate niche interest among Japan's hardcore RC enthusiasts, and they've delivered with an impressive videogame translation of the hobby.

Certainly, it's the best 'toy' simulation game **Edge** has seen for some time, and the feel of controlling tiny vehicles has been captured beautifully. Adventure mode sees the player hunting for stars in a typical Japanese home, with areas opening up once certain targets are reached. But many of the stars have been squirreled away in drawers, cupboards and hidden panels – all of which can be opened by pressing the 'fire' button.

The excellent handling makes for a relaxing and entertaining game, which makes the disappointment of completing it in an afternoon all the more profound. There's a Challenge mode – with *Super Monkey Ball 2*-style mini-objectives, but this too should only take a couple of hours. Hopefully, Aqua will deliver a more comprehensive package in the near future.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Marvel vs Capcom 2

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), November (UK)** Previously in **E**81







Just as the first game, Capcom's characters come from several genres, extending right across its back catalogue. It might not be the purest fighting game around, but it's unquestionably one of the most insane



So, while Cube owners get Capcom's sequential battle with arch-rivals SNK, Microsoft reqeives a port of the second ludicrous clash with Marvel. It is worth pointing out that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the GameCube edition of *Capcom vs SNK 2*, other than the fact that the non-conformist nature of the pad renders it unplayable in standard mode and the game is retarded in EO mode. The Xbox version of *Marvel vs Capcom 2* suffers a similar fate if you try and play it with the western pad – but this is a Japanese game, intended for Japanese machines and Japanese controllers, and with that it works acceptably.

Still, the game is better on the PS2's pad, where the D-pad and digital triggers hold up better to the fast, ludicrous combat. There's nothing new here, of course; it is still quarter turn and punch, still the same dynamic Capcom has been trading off for over ten years. But it is still good fun, and while the wealth of options, fighting styles and characters may be confusing to newcomers, the slapstick three-on-three action and superstupid specials will be a draw. It might be more a party game than a pure fighter, but it's difficult to sniff at the quality of the entertainment on offer.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

The Thing

Format: **PC (version tested), Xbox, PS2** Publisher: **Vivendi** Developer: **Computer Artworks** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**102, **E**109, **E**114

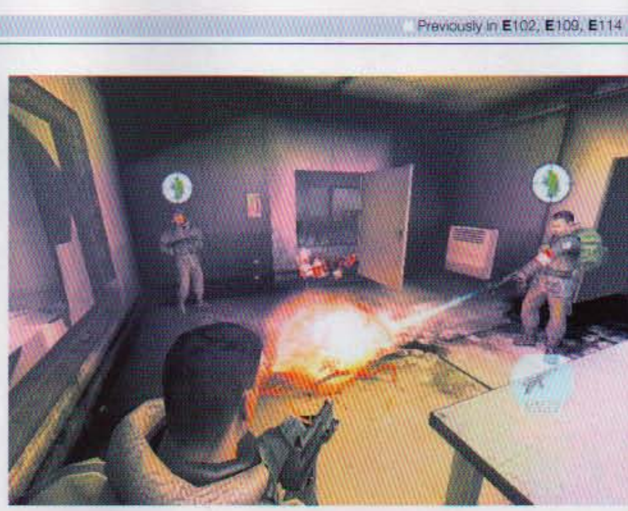
As the relationship between films and videogames becomes ever more snug, John Carpenter's 'The Thing' finally gets a videogame outing. Picking up after the events of the film, you play a soldier tasked with uncovering the horrific events which took place at the Antarctic research base.

At the core of *The Thing* is pressure: pressure to keep NPCs from becoming scared, homicidally paranoid or dying from the cold, along with more standard problems such as ammunition, mission objectives and plain old survival. *The Thing* also manages tension well: it's quite some time before you first fire your weapon in anger, despite dramatic hints that danger is ever just around the corner. But once the mutated alien monstrosities start coming, they hardly let up, and judicious use of the satisfying flamethrower is necessary to deal with the larger monsters.

A visually atmospheric experience – the bleak, terrifying Antarctic is particularly well-realised – is not let down by the fact that the game is essentially a linear series of set-pieces. Only the intrusion of too many unnecessary help screens at the start breaks up the otherwise coherent, thrilling experience.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









The weapon effects are particular good and your flamethrower will soon become your best friend. But let's face it, your colleagues are hardly to be trusted. One criticism of the game is its insistence on linearity. Keeping fellow men from the brink of insanity can be rewarding, but this is destroyed when they mutate in an inevitable set-piece

The making of…

Dizzy

Ignored by the videogame intelligentsia, loved by the masses, Dizzy was the blockbusting videogame phenomenon of mid-'80s Britain. And the story of how a smiling egg came to dominate the software charts for three years is one of bedroom coding taken to its absolute limits



Original format: **Spectrum**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Andrew Oliver, Philip Oliver**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1986**







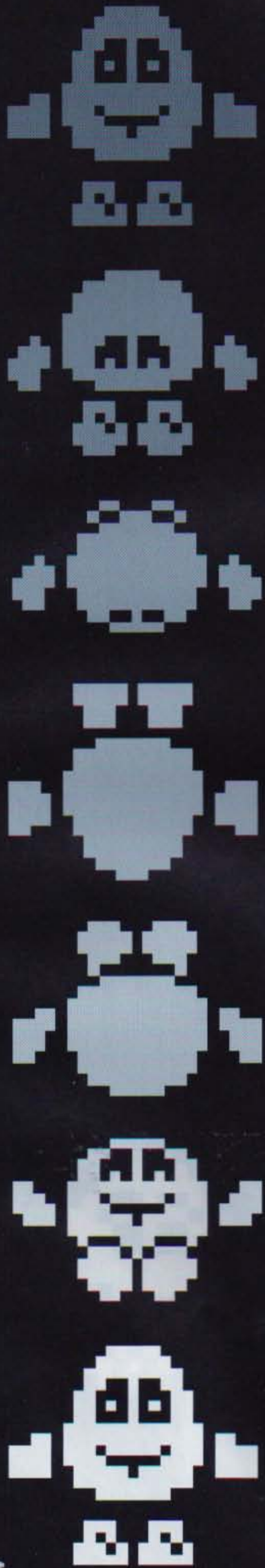


The tale of how the Oliver twins got into the videogame industry is one of those Britsoft yarns, comparable to the one about Gremlin starting up above a computer shop or Peter Molyneux and Les Edgar kick starting the development of *Populous* after receiving free Amiga hardware that should have gone to Torus, not Taurus. The brothers, recent purchasers of a BBC Micro, entered a competition on a Saturday morning kids show ("Isla St Clair, Tommy Boyd, Jeremy Beadle," remembers **Andrew Oliver**) to design a videogame. They won – being the only ones to send an actual game rather than a design idea drawn in crayon – and later sold *Gambit* to Acornsoft for £200.

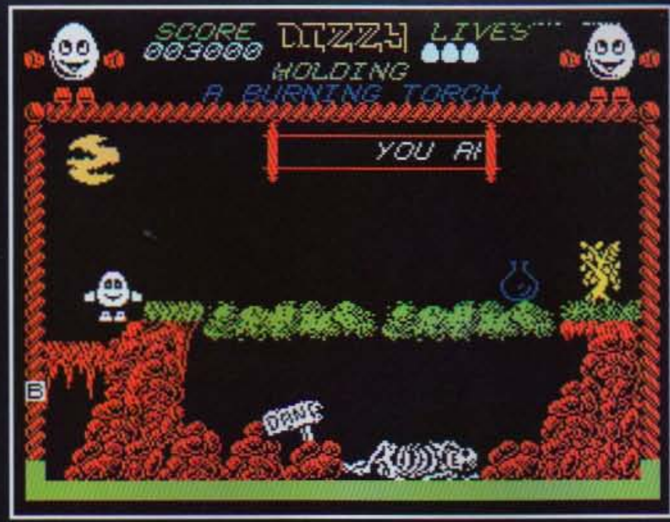
Spotting the money-making potential of videogames, Andrew and Philip spent the next year bashing out coin-op clones and educational software for a variety of budget publishers initially on the BBC and later on the Amstrad 6128. Then in September 1985, the twins attended the first ever ECTS where they met Richard and David Darling. The future Codemasters founders were setting up on their own and needed freelance programmers. "One of their lines was if







The original *Dizzy* featured familiar '80s gameplay elements such as collapsing platforms and pixel-perfect jumps



you write a game for us we'll give you £10,000.' recalls **Philip Oliver**. The catch was, it had to be out by Christmas so the brothers rushed home and wrote flip-screen platformer *Super Robin Hood* in six weeks. It sold 100,000 copies.

It was during work on the brothers' next Codemasters title, *Ghost Hunters*, that Philip started fiddling around with the basic character design that would lead to *Dizzy*. As he explains, "I was sitting there working on the star of *Ghost Hunters*, drawing his face, and I had three pixels high, four pixels wide and four colours. You can't be too creative with that, so I just got bored and started sketching ideas. It occurred to me that what we really needed was for the player to get empathy with a character, and the only way that would happen is if they could actually see the face. So I thought, I'll blow the face up, so it becomes the whole character. So we did the face as big as possible – we could print something like 32 pixels wide by about 48 pixels high, and still move it around fast. And of course once you've done that, there's no point in trying to create a realistic human – you've just got to create a cartoon character. So we drew on eyes, a mouth and nose, stuck some feet on. Arms are always expressive so we stuck them on, too. And that's it really… it literally took half an hour to come up with the *Dizzy* design."

Ghost Hunters went out with a more realistic human protagonist, but the twins wouldn't let their egg-shaped character go. They started imagining a game universe to suit the character. This creative freedom was a luxury of the haphazard way in which Codemasters worked at the time. In the early days, development staff were employed on a freelance basis, which usually meant single-man teams designing and writing games from home. On top of this, coders were responsible for managing their own projects. As Andrew puts it, "They never actually commissioned anything specific and we'd never get advances. You wrote games and gave them finished masters."





The Oliver brothers managed to tease impressively intricate locations from the rudimentary Spectrum hardware

Ultimate adventure

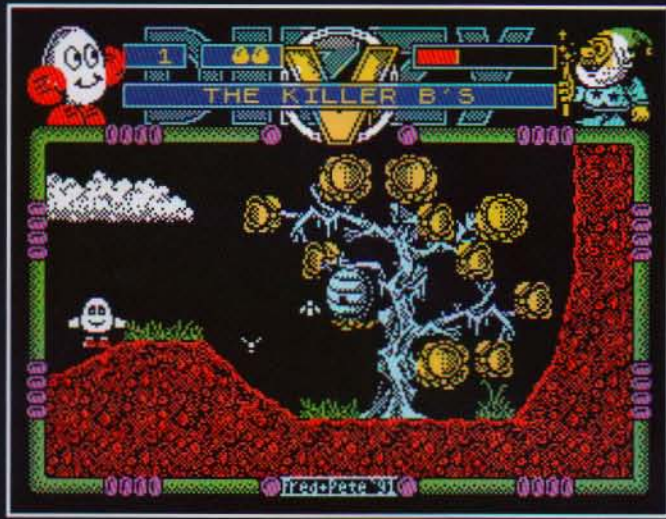
With *Dizzy*, Philip and Andrew set out, rather ambitiously, to create "the ultimate cartoon adventure." As unapologetic popularists, they wanted to capture a mass audience – which at that time was mostly young and inexperienced with technology. So they hit on the idea of theming a character-based puzzle/platform/adventure game around fairy tales – "they're rich and varied, and everybody all over the world knows them," asserts Philip. He continues, "Our basic mechanic for the gameplay was pick up an item and take it to where it can be used. Obviously, people had done that before, but they'd always done it with keys and doors, and if you make everything logical it becomes extremely boring." So these real-world devices were replaced with fairy tale systems. A magic bean, dropped in the right place, would grow a beanstalk to provide access to a high platform; an impassable giant rat could be coaxed away by playing a pipe borrowed from the Pied Piper. Simple yet charming and, as would become clear, hugely effective.

The production process behind the game was uniquely slick for the time. Says Philip, "We split backgrounds and foregrounds, so one of us did scenery and one would take all the moving characters. Don't ask about music, that was just a complete bodge."

By now the Spectrum was a much bigger market than the Amstrad, so *Dizzy* was developed for Sinclair's system. The brothers hated the squidgy keyboard, though, so they wrote the game on their Amstrad, getting an electronics expert friend to design a rudimentary serial cable capable of streaming data to the Spectrum via the printer port. "All we actually typed on the Spectrum – after writing a little load routine in ten lines of Basic – was LOAD " <enter>"," claims Andrew. "Then we put a tape in and that fired up the download software. Both machines were running Z80, they were very similar. They had slightly different graphics formats, but because we were generating the graphics inside a little editor we just put some options in to save out in both Spectrum and Amstrad formats." "We do the same thing with Xbox, GameCube and PS2," says Philip.

The Amstrad had other benefits apart from a decent keyboard. The machine





boasted an excellent disk drive offering random access, high speed and reliability. There was also a handy chip called MAXAM, which could be plugged into the expansion port at the back of the machine. It cost £80 and gave the ability to write Z80 assembler and compile it to machine code. This, of course, is one of the reasons the Olivers could write games so quickly – they weren't tied to the slow, unreliable tape-based system of writing straight to the Spectrum.

The brothers also developed design techniques and coding shortcuts to give *Dizzy* a singular look. "We created the backgrounds from a bank of 255 irregular-sized sprites, about 50 of them being the alphabet and numbers. Our editor allowed us to move any sprites around and drop it at any position on screen down to a pixel resolution, overlapping and 'mixing' with anything under it. To draw a tree we'd slap down several chunks of trunk on top of each other and then add some randomly placed foliage 'balls' above it, hey presto, a tree. To vary it a little further our sprite printer allowed us to flip sprites horizontally and vertically, allowing us to make things looks more unique and less repetitive. This made *Dizzy* games look quite organic and very different to other games of that time which all used aligned 8x8 graphic blocks (characters). With our method, you could describe a whole screen in a far less memory too, which let us create bigger and more interesting maps which contributed greatly to the success of *Dizzy*."



Later *Dizzy* titles tampered little with the classic gameplay – even when the Olivers sub-contracted the work out to other studios such as Big Red Software

The first *Dizzy*, released in 1986, was more of a slow burner than an instant chart smash, with word of mouth winning the game enduring sales. "It went out like any other Codemasters game at the time, with no real marketing, and it didn't really sell particularly well, although Codemasters received thousands of fan letters. And what they noticed was, every game they'd ever released sold for about a month and then died, but *Dizzy* just kept selling and selling. And a year later when we did *Treasure Island Dizzy* it was still selling. And when *Treasure* was released it went straight to number one."

From here on, the Oliver twins turned into a two-man production line, writing game after game in intense six-week bursts. By *Fantasy World Dizzy* (the third title in the series) they were knocking out two maps a day, drawing them on paper first before coding. The game was finished within a month. In 1986, the brothers were responsible for seven per cent of all games released in the UK, and they estimate that in the following year around 50 per cent of Codemasters' output had their names on it.

Daily grind

During this intense period in the mid-'80s, the pair were often programming for 20 hours a day, seven days a week. They became experts at sucking the fat out of the development process. "We wrote map editors, sprite editors, we re-used code – we'd write a sprite routine and use it for ever more. We did a random routine that was written in 1985 that we still used up until two years ago!" Later, after the first *Dizzy* titles, the brothers started farming sequels out to other developers and took on other Codies projects such as *Pinball Simulator* and *Jet Bike Simulator*. As Andrew explains, "To relieve our boredom we just did *Dizzy* game, sim game, *Dizzy* game, sim game, and every once in a while we'd chuck in something like *3D StarFighter*."

Codemasters released around 14 *Dizzy* titles across a multitude of platforms, the basic gameplay rarely straying from the original blueprint (apart from offshoot titles such as *Fast Food*, a *Pac-Man* clone, and *Dizzy Panic*, a *Tetris*-inspired puzzler). High review scores were rare, but the games maintained healthy sales. Indeed, *Dizzy* was undoubtedly the company's most profitable pre-*Micro Machines* franchise, helping it to survive its tumultuous courtroom dramas with Nintendo and Sega. Ironically, the only instalment to win any kind of industry award – 1991's *The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy* on the NES – would be the Oliver twins' final *Dizzy* release. As Codemasters plunged into a mega-money lawsuit brought against it by Nintendo for bringing out the Game Genie cheats device, the twins felt game development was suffering in the intensely political atmosphere and left soon after, having completed a couple of *Dizzy* titles which were never published.

In 1991, the brothers set up their own development outfit, Interactive Studios, which changed its name to Blitz in 1999. Intriguingly, the legacy of *Dizzy* lives on in the company's current output. Recently released cel-shaded Warner Brothers licence *Taz: Wanted* and forthcoming adventure title *Zapper* both feature sharp, colourful environments, well-realised characters and surreal puzzles – the building blocks of the *Dizzy* series. The Olivers are still going for the mainstream, charming the masses, and slipping under the radar of critical attention. They are content with that.







The name *Dizzy* comes from the fact that the Olivers' egg-shaped hero does cartwheels as he moves. This feature was only included because the brother's proprietary sprite editor had a sprite rotation facility written in and they fancied using it

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 52, December 1997

"Do not cross! Police line!" screamed the yellow tape stuck haphazardly to the cover of **E**52. What? Had **Edge**'s purple prose finally been classified a class A narcotic? Had destructive incisive copy finally claimed an industry victim? It was neither, **Edge** is afraid; the tape held **Edge**'s third CD to the cover, and marked the first review of DMA's *Grand Theft Auto*. "A uniquely engrossing and magnificently playable title," wrote **Edge**. "It's bound to attract the public's attention for all the wrong reasons, but then it is said that all publicity is good publicity."

Core Design might have well have the same platitude in mind with regards to the rumours of a *Tomb Raider* nude cheat, investigated in a sidebar in **Edge**'s 'Girl Trouble' article. "Core denies it [exists], as well as the rumours that it started the rumours in the first place," stated **Edge**, plainly not convinced. The article was more forthright in its criticism of sexual stereotyping. It closed with the request that developers spend as much time "developing personalities and in-game roles of female characters as they do developing those characters' breasts."

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"**Edge** suspects the country's top players would have lined up to show their support for bear baiting if sufficient cash was waved at them." **Edge** calls into question the motivation of a raft of football players who turned up to endorse Eidos' *Championship Manager*.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"Can you imagine the back problems? You would need scaffolding in later life to keep them off the floor." An anonymous female coder at Pumpkin Studios offers her opinion on Lara's twin selling points.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Tomb Raider 2 (PS, 9/10); *Top Gear Rally* (N64, 7/10); *Total Annihilation* (PC, 9/10); *I-War* (PC, 8/10); *Baku Bomberman* (N64, 5/10); *Overboard!* (PS, 7/10); *Colony Wars* (PS/PC, 6/10); *Total Drivin'* (PS, 8/10); *Fighting Force* (PS, 6/10); *Jedi Knight* (PC, 8/10); *Riven* (PC, 7/10)



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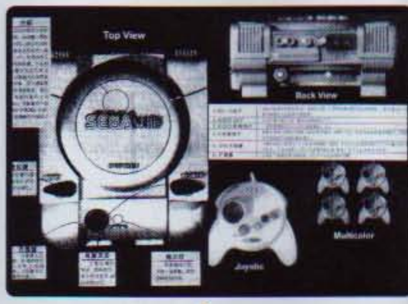
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6

1. The original *GTA*: remember when blood was measured in pixels, not polys? 2. Sailing! A! Ship! In! Psygnosis'! *Overboard!* 3. *Quake Arcade*, based on the principle that some *Quake* players might leave the house 4. Gaming: a hobby to be proud of 5. *Rival Schools: United by Fate* – "could be the start of something big" 6. Saturn 2, or Internet mockup?

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Gareth Jones, co-founder of WhizzBang TV, remembers Dune 2: The Battle for Arrakis





Dune 2 was Gaz's top game. Westwood really knew how to get a fresh game experience

In 1992 I managed to blag an Amiga with a bunch of games to review on a Saturday morning show I presented and produced. That's how I came to play *Dune 2: The Battle for Arrakis*.

Dune 2 is now known to be Westwood's first successful stab at realtime strategy, leading to the *Command & Conquer* phenomena, but back then I had no warning that this game would cause my life to go missing, and, in later years give me 'Nam-style flashbacks of Ornithopters. I close my eyes now, and see spice harvesters forging a path into an otherwise black screen, and hear the metallic clicks that responded whenever I commanded my House. The clarity of the voice sample "Acknowledged" resounds in my mind's ear to this day.

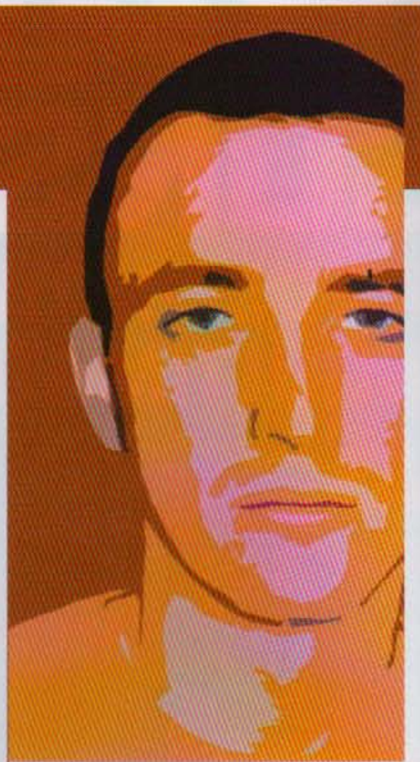
I spent more time in Pause mode figuring out what to do than in frantic action, but it was somehow more exciting for it. Those darned Ornithopters were still getting the better of me when events brought my battle to an end: I met my hero, Buzz Aldrin, and bought a PC. The next five years were spent trying to get *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space* to run on it.

Later, I gave my Amiga to my brother, John, who lives in a part of Wales where post-DOS technology has failed to penetrate. So, 13 years on, the House of Jones is still waging war on Arrakis.

FAQ

Mark Sample

game designer/assistant producer, Rage



Having spent the last 12 years working in the videogame industry, Mark Sample proudly lists *Actua Soccer* and *Driver* as two of the projects he's been involved with. He recently finished work as assistant producer on the excellent *Rocky* (see p90) and so found the time to fill in this page.

What was the first videogame you played?
Battlezone was probably the first videogame I played. I remember this because at the time I was too short to see through the view-finder of the cabinet, I used to play by looking up at the screen from underneath.

What was the first computer/games machine that you owned?
A ZX Spectrum 48k, bought way back in 1984. I was close to buying a Lynx 96k instead of the Spectrum, but thankfully a friend persuaded me otherwise after showing me *Wheelie*.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A *Defender*-esque shoot 'em up. I replaced the spaceship for a helicopter and the enemies became jet fighters, jeeps and tanks.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
I got my first job at Flair Software as an artist on the Commodore 64. That was in the good old days when blocky sprites, character cells and colour clash ruled the world. The first thing I ever designed was a personal expansion set of rules for 'Talisman', a very old Games Workshop board game.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Racing Destruction Set on the Commodore 64 by EA. At the time I'd never seen or played a game that allowed you to drive so many different vehicles. It even had its own track editor, shame it came on two tapes and took around 45 minutes to load.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Battlefield 1942. I think it's a great game. The vehicle diversity adds immensely to the overall playability.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
I spend around 6–8 hours per week playing games. It used to be more but times change, maybe I'm getting old.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
It's got to be *Strider*. I really enjoy leaping around the levels like a madman, great fun. It's not so easy finding the old arcade games in working order anymore, there's always an emulator though…

What's your favourite book, album and film of all time?
George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' – to me this book just about sums up everything in life. 'English Settlement' by XTC – a brilliant album by a much underrated band and Sam Mendes' 'American Beauty' – Lester Burnham rules.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
I often visit http://Remix.Kwed.org, which is a great site. If you're a fan of Commodore 64 remix tunes you'll find hundreds here. I also visit Gamespot, IGN and Eurogamer to keep up with the daily gaming news.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Super Mario World. For me that's still the perfect platform game. Instantly accessible, superb replay value, fun characters, plenty of levels, the list goes on…

Of all the game you've been involved with in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
Driver's probably my favourite because the team was extremely focused and efficient. It was very exciting to work on the game and even better that it turned out to be a smash hit.

"It can get quite depressing when you spend two years of your life on one game hoping it will be a winner when it hits the shelves"

What stage is your current project at?
Rocky is completely finished and should hit the shelves in early November. Work has already begun on our next project, but you'll have to wait and see what that is.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
Rocky's addictiveness is very impressive. Once two players get going it's very difficult to get the pads back of them and the intensity of the battles matches that of the films in every sense.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
The ability to play videogames without the use of a control pad – just plug your brain into the control port via a lead and off you go.

What disappoints you about the industry?
Long development times can be annoying. Each year games take that little bit longer to complete, and it can get quite depressing when you spend around two years of your life on one game hoping it will be a winner when it hits the shelves.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
I enjoy being able to work with people passionate about making games. I also enjoy seeing daily improvements in the games I work on. Each day it gets a little bit better.

Whose work do you most admire?
Sega – for still managing to show how true arcade games should be made.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
I look forward to all new platforms. Each one gives me a chance to continue making games on cutting edge technology.

What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
Personally I can take it or leave it in its current state. Small blurry screens and difficult controls are two of the biggest hurdles it has to overcome.

inbox>

Communicate by post:
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Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I've always felt somewhat uneasy with videogames centred on wars that have taken place in living memory, but realise that generationally and culturally things mean different things to different people. However, when one of my Muslim colleagues at work was visibly bemused at reading your review of *Conflict: Desert Storm* (**E**115) it brought up a lot of old issues for me, and moreover an increasing disappointment that **Edge** doesn't seem to pay any more attention to ethical issues within games than it did a year ago when the point was first raised.

Conflict: Desert Storm is a videogame centred on events that happened not just within living memory but within one generation's memories. UN estimates put the number of Iraqi dead directly from the conflict at 250,000, be they civilians or conscripted soldiers. There can be no more jarring indictment of our juxtaposed cultures than on the one side, thousands of families living in poverty and presumably still mourning the deaths of their loved ones from the conflict, while on the other, we re-enact the whole situation on consoles that cost more than 80 per cent of the world population's monthly wage, for our own visible enjoyment – not to mention the thought of playing the game in three months' time while the real-life horror happens all over again.

Once again, the issue is not one of censorship, which is a futile exercise and only staves off the discussion as opposed to engaging with it. But that's exactly what's not happening at the moment – videogames can be executed with the utmost finesse in terms of gameplay and graphics, but we have to treat the subject matter with as much serious attention, and ask certain things – will the game alienate minority sections of our society? If it's based on real-life events, are they accurately portrayed? Is there any hidden agenda going on? They're difficult questions to ask, and the temptation is to just not bother, but without them, we're left yet again looking like an industry whose fascination with artillery and how many different ways you can blow somebody's limbs off supersedes all else. At the end of the day, if **Edge** of all publications isn't going to ask these questions, nobody else will.
Mark Whitfield

Edge is, first and foremost, a videogame magazine. With space at a premium, conveying the merits of a particular game takes priority, even over social or moral comment on events of global significance, however horrific. The publication's primary function is to look at titles from a purely gameplay perspective, in effect disassociating the game from any real-world event that 'inspired' it.

In retrospect, the prescreen you mention could have been phrased more tactfully. Ultimately, *Conflict: Desert Storm* is a good game, and it would still be a good game without its licence. Is it exploitative? Of course – but in no more a manner than the many offensively patronising and stereotype-filled Hollywood productions out there, for instance.

However, this is by no means an excuse to ignore moral issues and traditionally **Edge** has commented on what it has considered to be areas of potential concern. When appropriate, we will continue to do so.

I find Paul Ibbotson's comment regarding intellectual challenge in gaming when compared to other pastimes fairly invalid. Can the puzzle-solving antics of *Riven* really be compared to a read of 'The Lord of the Rings'? There is no brain-teasing mystery to a linear narrative. There are no 'open puzzles' for you to figure out. All plot matters are divulged from chapter to chapter and are handed to you on a plate; all you have to do is read the book. The intelligence to be found in reading a novel is in considering the greater meanings and consequences that come from the social, political and cultural context of the text.

Ironically when considering this, the one game that Paul criticises for not being intelligent enough, *MGS2*, turns out to be one of the games most worthy of intelligent thought and discussion. Many an academic mind could write an essay on the Psycho-Mantis level and its relationship between text and reader in terms of postmodernism and the direction in which this pushes interactive entertainment. While I'm sure a study of *Metal Gear Solid 2* in a post-9/11 climate would yield interesting results. My suggestion to Paul is that if he wants his games to be more intelligent then he should himself approach them with a bit more intelligence and think of them as culturally significant products rather than just something to pass the time. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned here from the mainstream press and high-end academics too.
Ashley Day

While it's true that Hideo Kojima has cleverly played with the conventions of videogame narrative in both *Metal Gear Solid* and *Metal Gear Solid 2*, it does not follow that the stories themselves are either profound or sophisticated. Indeed, many might argue that there's more substance and emotional depth to be found in Tove Jannson's Finn Family Moomintroll books. But your point is well taken; videogames are as worthy of study as any other medium. We just need a few more good narrative artists to do the form justice.

In reference to the article in **E**114 about companies delivering games and other digital media via high-speed Internet connections, I just thought I would make a point on the subject. I feel that these companies, as well as Sony and Microsoft that seem to have similar plans, underestimate the fun of buying. There is a clear difference between buying and paying for something. A large part of the fun, or whatever you want to call it, in buying games is associated with the actual physical product. I believe that many that have downloaded pirated software from the Net agree when I say that it is just not as fun as buying the game. Morals aside, I think that most people will agree that a large part of the fun comes from the physical aspect: going to your store or

"Videogames can be executed with the utmost finesse in terms of gameplay and graphics, but we have to treat the subject matter with as much serious attention"



Final Fantasy IX, **the worst of Square's narrative-based games, and one that turned Andrew Shaw off gaming. Where's the passion nowadays?**

picking up the package at the post office. Looking at the case, reading the booklet and physically putting the game into your console or PC, for that first play, should not be underestimated as sources of enjoyment. I believe that many people also like the look of their game collection, when it is put in the bookcase. The same things apply to **Edge**. Most of the information is available for free on the Internet; why should people spend money each month buying **Edge**? Because there is a different feeling to a magazine, holding it, reading it in bed, at breakfast or in the bathroom. Picking out that favourite issue from three years ago and reading it again is another example associated with the physical product. So my point is, do not underestimate the fun, and power, of buying.
Jesper Koefoed

Edge heartily agrees. The physical element of retail therapy should not be underestimated.

I am a long-term reader though have never yet felt compelled to write to you, but when I recently read with great interest the 'Piracy in the Playground' article (**E**113), this changed. I am 18 years old and own both a GameCube and an Xbox, along with the major 'last-generation' machines. Being 18 means that I have just completed my A-levels and left a college where, like at any school, videogame piracy was rife and opinions were similar to those of the pupils who took part in your survey for the article. I was one of the few who were actually willing to pay £40-plus for a (good) game, and didn't own any copied disks. Some found my lack of interest in copyright theft strange, but in reality I have built up a far more appealing collection of games than any pirate could manage, purely because they aren't cheap copies and I know I've worked hard for the money exchanged for them.

Indeed, many of the pirates at college believed that they were even doing the industry a favour and citing the success of the PSone as justification for their actions. I see this attitude as dangerous for the industry as a whole and find it hard to believe that the major players aren't doing more to counter the problem. Surely they can see that one copied game (almost like a pair of fleas) can produce hundreds more, and yet they do nothing to stop the infestation of illegal disks on the nation's markets and car-boot sales. I do believe that a software price drop to around £20–25 would greatly diminish the number of pirate games, but I fear it is a problem that will never totally go away. Either way, my stance will remain unchanged. I see no reason to ever purchase an illegal copy of a game and fund the pirates, even if the RRP of the real thing is still too high.
Dan Walton

Over recent years my interest in videogames has declined to the point where I have no intention of buying into any of the next-gen consoles, and I only play shareware/freeware games on my PC. It's testament to what a great read your magazine is that I still read **Edge**.

Now my passion for videogames is no more, but I've inherited from my game-playing days a fascination for Japan and Japanese culture, and to replace videogames my new hobby is Japanese anime and manga, some of which, rather embarrassingly, is supposed to be for kids. But the amazing beauty of the artwork, and the coherent and uplifting fantasy storylines transcend age, and it's all a world away from the clichéd, cynical cash-ins that have put me off videogames. However, in comparing my old hobby with my new one I have some observations to make on some of the regular themes of your letters page:

1. Videogaming is a very cheap hobby. I've spent over £1,000 this year on import DVDs, books, etc. Studio Ghibli films cost $50 each and I'll probably only watch them twice. Racing games or RPGs costing £30, on the other hand, have given me hundreds of hours of playing time, on my own or with friends. Even if you take the consoles into account, which the manufacturers make a loss on in any case, videogames are fantastic value.

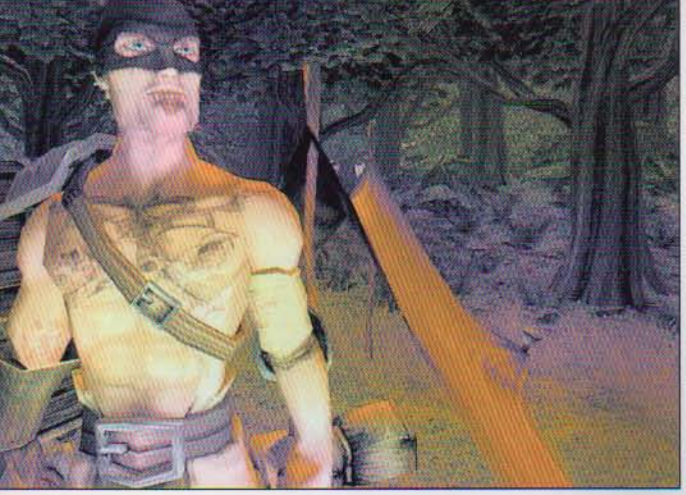
2. Now if only videogames would match the quality/content of anime they'd be unbeatable value – compare the terrible script and dialogue of *Xenogears* with the brilliance of Clamp's 'Clover'. There's really no contest. Too much time spent on flashy graphics and FMV, and little on storyline or character development. When did I ever actually care about a game character? Aeris dying in *FFVII*, and, er, that's it. With manga on the other hand, I care about what happens to Sakura and her friends, I felt sad for Suu at the end of 'Clover', and I instantly fell in love with Chi from 'Chobits'. This isn't about siliconised 'emotion engines', it's about having the talent and skills to make you believe in the creation before you, to make you really care about the characters and their fate. Compare with Lara Croft – does anyone know what her personality really is? Does she have one?

3. Piracy – I would play and have played (in the distant past) pirated software. But I would never do this with anime despite the easy availability of gold disks on the various auction sites. I have far too much respect for the manga artists to do this. The passion of these artists for their work comes across on every page, in every brushstroke of the pencil. But I perceive no such passion in videogames. I saw it in *FFVII*, and *FFVIII* was okay, but *FFIX*? I'll never go back to Square's games. *Tomb Raider* and *Tomb Raider 2* were great, but *TR3* and *TR4*? I'll never go back. And how much passion is there, even for the sport of football, in a *FIFA* game?

Perhaps I'm being harsh. Videogames are unlike any other entertainment format. But if I can get passionate about ordering an import 'Chobits' DVD in a language I don't speak a word of, but not give a damn about a PlayStation2 and a copy of *Final Fantasy X*, I have to ask myself why? The answer is I just can't believe in videogames any more – they're fake.
Andrew Shaw

Edge is sorry that your passion for videogames has waned, but there's clearly a difference between

"I do believe that a software price drop to around £20–25 would greatly diminish the number of pirate games, but I fear it is a problem that will never totally go away"



Smug PC gamers will soon have reason to worry, argues Adam Phillips. With ambitious titles like *Fable* coming to console, is the PC on the way out?

following a character in an anime series and that of a game icon who might get an airing once a year, if you're lucky. Be mindful of the moment. Videogames – at their best – offer a series of dramatic predicaments to test the nerve, the brain and the reflexes. Try *Super Monkey Ball 2*, *Super Mario Sunshine* or *Pro Evolution Soccer* and you might rekindle that old flame.

"You're a console gamer. You're dumb. You're stupid. You're unevolved. Hell, you're not even in the gene pool – you're still waiting in line at reception behind the contestants from 'Big Brother' to pay to get in it. You must be a 'casual gamer'. The lowest common denominator. Compared to us, your games are merely a void where innovation should be, you PlayStation protozoa."

An exaggeration of some PC gamers. But only just, mind you. To be frank, certain members of the PC gaming community seem to be desperate to label themselves as gamers at the cutting edge. That wading your way through all the bugs, glitches and ropey operating systems somehow means that you're right on the cusp of gaming innovation. That paying way over the odds for an entertainment system really is justified. That if you want the best, you've gotta pay for it with continual graphics card/memory upgrades. And take all the above downsides on the chin with all the bravado of a porn actress.

If you don't go through all of this then you're a cop out – you must be a console owner. The owner of one of those wretched boxes which take away all the hassle, gives you virtually bug-free games, an ergonomically intelligent input device (that's a joypad) and a stable platform which, unlike a current PC, will still be capable of playing new games in three years' time.

Because of these benefits, in the eyes of some PC gamers, console games then must be unsophisticated. They can't push the envelope unlike us, the PC game playing pioneers. They're way too mainstream. Middle of the road. Unoriginal. Sequel-ridden.

Oh, yeah? Let's see what gaming innovations the average PC gamer has been buying into over the last six months or so: *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (shoot things in the face); *The Sims: Hot Date*; *Soldier of Fortune 2* (shoot things in the face); *Milk It Tycoon*; *Jedi Knight 2* (light saber things in the face; fall off ledge to death) *The Sims: Enema Edition*; *Medal of Honor* (console-to-PC update), etc.

What about those timeless innovations, though? You know – *Deus Ex*? *Black & White*? Fair enough, the PC historically has excelled in this area and still does. No argument there – those two games were part of the reason I spent a fortune on upgrading my PC. Indeed, console owners had to wait (or are waiting) for the aforementioned titles to come out but never mind, they were playing the innovative *Halo* and *Grand Theft Auto III* to keep themselves entertained – how long did you have to wait for the latter on your PC (and its awful framerates)? And just how long exactly will you have to wait for the former?

As for the future, well, console owners will be enjoying *Halo 2* and the much-anticipated RPG *Fable* on Xbox (not PC) and indulging in the likes of *Ico* while they're waiting for *Deus Ex 2* to be converted. Oh, and as we know, online multiplaying is on the near horizon as well, console-wise.

And the funny part is that you can buy all three consoles currently on the market for the price of a kick-ass PC and still have enough money left over to have a holiday in, say, Australia. For two weeks. By the beach. Or alternatively spend the leftover money on a second-hand PC (or Mac) to do that pesky word processing.

Perhaps then being a diehard PC owner who won't look beyond his mouse isn't so smart after all. Perhaps that's why PC sales continue to shrink because people can get their gaming kicks from other sources without all the hassles, costs and patches. And software companies surely know this – that's why innovative titles in their own right do surface on consoles or are ported over increasingly as gamers embrace consoles because they are interested in gameplay rather than in increasingly irrelevant loyalties.

So for those detractors of consoles, stay smug. That warm glow of superiority will keep you all toasty. Which is important because one day, you may well find yourselves left out in the cold.
Adam Phillips

I refer to the news that the Greek government passed legislation in July outlawing all electronic or mechanical games, which appears to have taken a rather peculiar twist into a McCarthy-style witch hunt of Greek gamers. It is reported that cybercafes are being closed down and computers confiscated in a bid to stamp out an illegal gambling epidemic thought to be worth €320m per day.

The issues relating to the alleged gambling epidemic aside, the vision of a poor innocent Greek gamer happily engrossed in an online game of *Counter Strike* suddenly being arrested by a rapid response unit and dragged into an armoured van would be comical if the reality were not so serious. Even the Conservative-biased press in the UK – who, over time, have attempted to pin everything from schizophrenia to autism to violent criminal behaviour to terrorism on gamers – would be hard pressed to support the apparent current actions of the Greek government.

The lack of logic and intelligence with which this legislation appears to have been operationalised is staggering, and I wonder where it might go. One would not have to search too hard to find an American politician who would advocate a total ban on gaming, probably claiming personal backing from almighty Gawd.

I suppose an analysis of the root causes of gambling and the socio-cultural reasons that may have resulted in the alleged 'epidemic' in Greece would have been regarded as plain 'crazy' by the establishment. Unemployment is up again. Computer games that is.
Jay Smith

"You can buy all three consoles for the price of a kick-ass PC and still have enough money left over to have a holiday in, say, Australia. For two weeks. By the beach"





Is *Britney's Dance Beat* too immature for Edge readers, as Afterbirth suggests? No, it's just a poor game. *Dungeon Seige*, meanwhile, would benefit from sophisticated monster interactions, argues Kenshi. If only they could talk to each other...

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: **Stupid Games Design #2: Orgy of Evil**
Poster: **Kenshi**
Another one from *Dungeon Siege*, although it's a classic and you'll have seen it loads of other games too. You enter a room. It's obviously meant to be a hard room, 'cause it is teeming with all sorts of baddies: skeletons, gargoyles, goblins, etc. Demonstrating a utopian level of co-operation and unity they all spot their one enemy: you. And proceed to stomp/run/crawl towards you to keeeell you.

I mean, this is just silly. Shouldn't these most evil of beings be trying to kill each other or simply stealing the treasure? The living dead should be going after the nearest living things around. The cowardly goblins should be turning on each other or be grabbing the loot and running. The dungeon-exploring genre is incredibly old (*Nethack* was the first, right?), so why haven't we seen even a rudimentary attempt to have some intelligent interactions (and games designs) amongst the enemy?

Poster: **TigerMaple**
Slightly related, but not: how about giving the player the scope to influence the interactions between classes/races in games? Say group A and group B are neighbours, and have lived peacefully together. And the player's character comes from group A, but during an adventure that goes into group B's territory, accidentally shoots someone from group B. After that, group B would not like the player, and would then not like group A, and you would in effect kick off a war. Or something. Sorry, it made fantastic sense in my head, but the hangover has fogged my brain once more.

Subject: **Why the *Britney* review?**
Poster: **Afterbirth**
You know your readers are mature...
You know your readers are adult...
You know your readers are hardcore...
So why do we want to know about a kids' game?

Poster: **Tom Camfield**
Why? It's a rhythm-action game, just like *DDR* or *Bust-A-Move*, *PaRappa* or *Samba De Amigo*. People like these games; people want to know if they're any good. At least it wasn't another Capcom beat 'em up. Plenty of developers have used popular names (Colin McRae, Tony Hawk) and built a great game around them. There's no reason to assume they wouldn't be able to do it again. After all, she dances, the game's about dancing, they really couldn't go wrong. It's a tribute to THQ that they managed to fuck it up.

Poster: **Iainl**
Why?
1. The existence of a several-page article this month, combined with **Edge** reviewing lots of them and several forum discussions on the subject, tells you that they know lots of people like rhythm games.
2. *Dancing Stage EuroMix* (the most popular of the very few games to get a UK release) has tunes that are at the very least as cheesy as anything Britney has done. I'm not a fan of the lady's works, but are you really going to argue that they don't deserve consideration when the opposition have 'classics' like 'Word Up' and 'I Will Survive' instead?

What let down the game (as far as I understand from the review) was a lacklustre implementation and too few songs included. If it was a good *DDR* clone with a whole album's worth of songs on it I'd have certainly considered purchasing it instead of *EuroMix*, *DisneyMix* or the Jungle Book one, which are the only other options available to non-importers.

Poster: **Afterbirth**
I just think these kind of no-game all-media titles are a waste of time. You play for two minutes and earn a video. Great. It's just if I wanted all that shit I'd go and buy the video instead. Sure, I have the choice not to buy this game, so perhaps I was being a little harsh on **Edge**. They could have made it a half-page review, though.

Poster: **Dante Alighieri**
It was a half-page review, mate.

Subject: **Animal Crossing – Love Letters**
Poster: **Penguin_Lad**
Am I the only one to write a love letter to one of the other characters? I chose the sexy feline Tangy, obviously the most nubile piece of ass in the local town of Salford. Thanks to Dean Roskell for letting me be a part of this fantastic place.

Anyway, I told her she was hot, and we should get together some time. I'm going to have to wait to see if she responds. Damn, don't you hate the waiting part when you've asked a girl out?

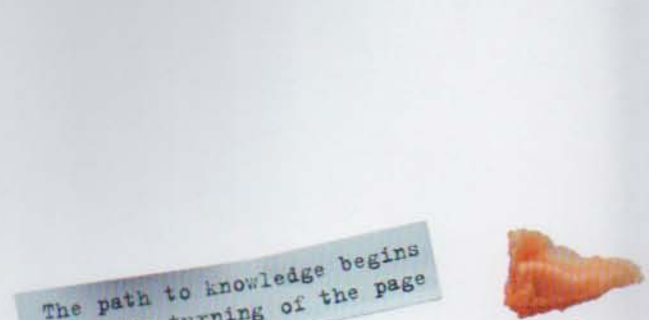
Poster: **Wesker**
I wrote a letter to a panda called pinky, asking for some sweet love by the fire. She didn't reply... And when I asked a mouse if he liked Pokémon his reply was, "Wow, this is great, I'll show this letter to my friends. Bye!" Pfft.

"This is silly. Shouldn't these most evil of beings be trying to kill each other or simply stealing the treasure? The living dead should be going after the nearest living things around"

Next month

FXXKED?

Why **Edge** swears Microsoft's console is becoming the new Dreamcast


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